

Employer Branding in A/S Norske Shell

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Executive summary

This thesis is a case study of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. It aims to answer three research questions on the basis of qualitative in-depth interviews with employees of A/S Norske Shell and Shell globally. The thesis is valuable in that it explores employer branding; a concept that is still emerging and developing, and which seems to have gained an influential position in several organizations (Edwards 2012: 389). Moreover, the study is empirically rooted, meaning that it could be a contribution to help bridge the current research-practice divide in the domain of employer branding (Frandsen and Morsing 2009: 256). The paper starts by discussing the antecedent and developments of employer branding and illustrates the close linkages between reputation management and the branding discipline¹. As such, it places the concept both in an academic and a practical framework.

The first research question aims to discuss the motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell, and this question is approached from the modernist-, social constructivist-, and pragmatic institutional perspectives on organizations (Røvik 2007: chapter 2). I argue that the motives and driving forces of employer branding adhere to both a rational logic and a symbolic dimension. On the one hand, employer branding is intended to solve organizational challenges and contribute to more effective and professional recruitment processes. On the other hand, it is argued that employer branding could be understood as a concept to conform to the expectations of the environment, and to add to the reputation, image and stakeholder perceptions of A/S Norske Shell. As such, employer branding is about gaining trust and legitimacy in the external environment. The study also discusses the role of the global consulting firm Universum in defining and constructing what is to be considered successful employer branding in the context of A/S Norske Shell. The role of Universum illustrates that employer branding is not only industry-specific, but a field in itself. It is also evident that the process of employer branding is mainly top-down driven. At the same time, I argue that A/S Norske Shell is not passively adopting and conforming to the employer branding activities of the global organization, nor uncritically trusting the reports of Universum; rather, one *tries* to adapt the activities so that they fit with the local context. Arguably, the motives and driving forces of employer branding could be seen to adhere to both a rational logic and a symbolic logic. This observation fits with the pragmatic

¹ 'The branding discipline' refers to the specific literature on branding; namely, product branding, employer branding and corporate branding.

institutional perspective. However, the perspectives are not seen as mutually excluding, and they are all combined in order to gain a holistic understanding. Consequently, the motives and driving forces of employer branding call for a multi-faceted understanding of the concept.

The second research question discusses A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding in light of the presumed institutionalized recipe on it, and discusses the challenges that could arise. The analysis shows that A/S Norske Shell in many ways are conforming to the recipe on important areas, for instance in having researched and developed segmented employer value propositions (EVPs) targeted to different stakeholders; the employer branding process being driven top-down; the employer brand being consistent with the corporate brand; and monitoring and adjusting the activities in line with market developments and stakeholder perceptions. However, A/S Norske Shell's approach also differs in that the EVPs are not necessarily perceived as an authentic representation of the organization by the internal audience, and that there seems to be an overemphasis on the rational dimensions of the employer brand at the expense of the symbolic dimensions of the employer brand. Hence, the employer brand of A/S Norske Shell appeals more to the 'head' than the 'heart', resulting in the organization being associated with hard values. Additionally, a challenge of A/S Norske Shell is to brand its uniqueness and distinctiveness so as to become differentiated from its competitors. It is also illustrated that there is a challenge to brand A/S Norske Shell as an 'innovative' organization as the employees cannot identify with this characterization. Simultaneously, it is evident that several of the projects in Shell, and in A/S Norske Shell in particular, could be regarded as technical innovations, but that there is a challenge to express these aspects due to technical complexity and confidentiality of several projects. Moreover, it is argued that the notion of having unique and segmented EVPs tailored to persuade individual candidates, adds to a manipulative dimension of employer branding. The latter argument is in line with Frandsen and Kjærgaard's (2014: 652-653) critical perspective on branding.

Finally, the study discusses the particular challenges that arise in A/S Norske Shell as a result of being a part of a multinational organization. It is argued that A/S Norske Shell is subject to dual isomorphic pressures from both the central organization of Shell and the domestic environment in which it operates. Particularly, the tension between standardization and local tailoring of employer branding activities is emphasized, as well as cultural challenges.

Preface

The process of conducting and finishing this thesis has been far from linear, and there are several people as to whom I am deeply indebted.

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Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	The multinational challenges	3
1.2	Research questions	4
1.3	Shell: a multinational organization with a local presence	7
1.4	Structure of the study.....	9
2	The concept of employer branding: antecedents and developments.....	10
2.1	Reputation management	10
2.2	Corporate branding	11
2.2.1	Linking reputation management and the branding discipline	13
2.3	Employer branding	14
2.3.1	The recipe on employer branding.....	17
2.3.2	The practical value of employer branding: explaining the interest in the concept... ..	19
3	The institutional paradigm	21
3.1	The modernist perspective.....	21
3.1.1	Theoretical expectations.....	22
3.2	The social constructivist perspective	23
3.2.1	Theoretical expectations.....	24
3.3	The pragmatic institutional perspective.....	25
3.3.1	Theoretical expectations.....	27
3.4	The multinational organization and institutional theory.....	27
3.4.1	Theoretical expectations.....	29
4	Methodological approach.....	31
4.1	Research approach	31
4.2	Literature review and source criticism	32
4.3	Recruiting the informants	33
4.4	Interviews	34
4.5	Analysis of the data	35

4.6	Quality criteria.....	35
4.7	Challenges and limitations.....	36
4.8	Ethics	38
5	Discussion and analysis.....	39
5.1	Motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell	39
5.1.1	Employer branding as a rational tool	39
5.1.2	The symbolic value of employer branding.....	41
5.1.3	The ambiguity of employer branding.....	45
5.2	A/S Norske Shell and the recipe on employer branding	46
5.3	Employer branding and the multinational challenges	53
5.3.1	Downstream and upstream: the tension between ‘head’ and ‘heart’	56
6	Conclusion.....	58
6.1	Further research	60
	Literature	64
	Internet sources	70
	Internal documents	72
	Appendix A	75
	Appendix B	76
	Appendix C	79

1 Introduction

Reputation management and branding have become influential and dominating concepts in both the public and the private sector. Today, organizations are expected to develop their own identity and be proactive with regards to society's perception of them, and it is also believed that they should seek to influence the perceptions in a positive direction (Byrkjeflot 2010: 3). Furthermore, it is argued that the Western society is dominated by a branding logic where everything is being branded: products, individuals, organizations, cities and nations (Frandsen and Kjærgaard 2014: 641). This implicates that organizations often work strategically and goal-oriented with the aim of protecting and enhancing their reputation and brand position. Through external communication and branding initiatives, organizations are constantly confirming and maintaining themselves as legitimate actors. According to Christensen (1997: 197-198), organizations regularly feel that they have to remind the external environment, as well as themselves, about what they stand for and what they are. However, the assumption that the outside world is genuinely involved and engaged in what organizations have to say, is challenged by Christensen and Cheney (2000), who argue that this notion is primarily generated by organizations themselves “[...] in their relentless pursuit of visibility and legitimacy in the marketplace” (Christensen and Cheney 2000: 247). In their effort to present themselves in a favorably manner, organizations have become very concerned with speaking and appearing as unified and integrated actors. This often results in a top-down approach to communication and branding. Hence, one risks that the communication and branding efforts are not an authentic and trustworthy representation of the organization. Conversely, although the efforts may account for an authentic representation, a potential challenge is that the recipients of the expressed messages cannot relate or identify with them.

Employer branding is a concept that has gained increased attention and scrutiny in the recent years, and is a phenomenon that accounts for the exchange of ideas between organizations and their environment (Hagen 2008: 30). Employer branding is traditionally defined as “[...] the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employer” (Ambler and Barrow 1996: 186). The concept is particularly concerned with an organization's reputation as an employer among current and potential employees, and with what differentiates the organization from competitors. The thesis will return to a more thorough discussion of the employer branding concept later in the paper. As a research field, employer branding is still emerging, and the current literature is mostly

associated with practitioner contributions (Edwards 2012: 389). As a business tool, employer branding is recognized for its potential to attract, retain and develop employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004: 501). As such, it can be targeted both internally and externally. Several organizations in different industries invest substantial resources in activities with the aim of strengthening their employer brand, and it is believed that the outcome of the activities is reflected in employer branding rankings. Particularly, the global consulting firm Universum, which specializes in employer branding surveys and analysis, seems to have gained a strong position as an accredited and influential carrier in the field. Universum ranks organizations as attractive employers based on student and professional surveys both globally and nationally. In several organizations it has become an aim in itself to climb on the rankings of Universum. As the rankings are made public, organizations can compare their results with competitors and seek to identify measures that could enhance and improve their employer brand. Although the rankings could be criticized on methodological grounds and for not taking sufficient regard to local contexts, they are nonetheless interpreted and understood as important indicators of an organization's reputation as a place to work among Human Resources (HR) and recruitment leaders (Edwards 2012: 393). Hence, the rankings are interpreted as a defining part of the organizational reality. Additionally, one could argue that employer branding activities legitimize the HR- and recruitment functions as they become engaged in the strategic domain of the organization. This type of argument is particularly attractive to HR practitioners *"[...] who have often struggled to gain legitimacy in an increasingly commercialized business context"* (Edwards 2009: 269).

One of the main challenges and dilemmas with regards to reputation management in the oil and gas industry is the 'green wave', with its inherent emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business ethics (Carroll 1999; Frandsen and Morsing 2009; Hagen 2008). In fact, CSR and the ethical movement can be viewed as possible reasons as to why employer branding has become so influential and popular in many organizations, as it could be an endeavor to respond to these trends. Additionally, Edwards (2012: 402), as well as Frandsen and Morsing (2009: 260-262), illustrate that graduate students are becoming increasingly concerned about an organization's values and responsibility when considering where to work, which has a direct impact on employer branding initiatives. Heilmann and colleagues (2013: 287) argue that CSR has been identified as one of the most important key drivers of an employer brand due to the increased emphasis on being a preferred and ethical employer. For the oil and gas companies, this implicate that they should brand themselves as

responsible, although the industry has not traditionally been viewed as such. Rather, the industry has at times been subject to intense debate and criticism. Particularly, the Shell experience in the mid-1990s following the company's initial decision to sink the oil storage buoy Brent Spar in the North Sea, combined with the execution of a rebel leader in Nigeria where Shell was present, caused massive harm to the reputation of Shell, as well as weakened the financial strength of the company (Fombrun and Rindova 2000: 77-81). The two critical episodes led Shell to develop a strategic approach to reputation management with a particular emphasis on transparency, issues management and stakeholder management (Fombrun and Rindova 2000). After some time, Shell managed to turn its negative reputation around, and is today perceived as one of the pioneers when it comes to strategic reputation management.

1.1 The multinational challenges

One of the main challenges of the MNC is the dilemma of balancing the need for integrating and standardizing practices across different countries, while at the same time recognizing local differences (Aaker and Joachimstahler 1999: 144). The need for integrated, global strategies and corporate communication are characteristic features of several multinational organizations today, and the idea of consistency is a pervading one (Christensen and Morsing 2008: chapter 1). Westney (2005: 53) argues that the local subsidiary of a multinational organization is subject to isomorphic pulls, i.e. pressures for similarity, both from the headquarters as well as from the domestic environment in which it operates. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theory of homogenization predicts that organizations will become more similar as a result of isomorphism. They distinguish between three distinctive isomorphic processes; coercive, normative and mimetic. Coercive isomorphism could for instance be a result of laws and regulations that are judicially coercive, normative isomorphism could refer to adaptation due to common norms and rules in certain proficiencies, whereas mimetic isomorphism could be situations in which organizations attempt to copy others that they believe have success and influence in the organizational field², often due to uncertainty. Thusly, one would expect that A/S Norske Shell is subject to several and perhaps conflicting isomorphic pressures. Obviously, this is an assumption that applies to several business areas of the organization, not only to employer branding.

² DiMaggio and Powell (1983:148) define an organizational field as "[...] those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products".

The task of creating, maintaining and managing the organizational reputation and the employer brand is not an easy endeavor in MNCs covering a wide variety of business activities within numerous, heterogeneous environments and stakeholder networks (de Chernatony 2002: 41-42). For a multinational organization, managing the organizational reputation and employer brand involve, for instance, considering whether the brand essence and core values are transferrable, the degree of standardization, and how to achieve integration and coherence across cultural and national borders (Birkstedt 2012: 183). In practice, global Human Resource Management (HRM) revolves around the ability of the organization to find a concept that has relevance to employees across several countries, despite the fact that various values are embedded in different national countries, and despite the possibility that these concepts may end up being operationalized with local adaptation (Birkstedt 2012: 183). A MNC is also more vulnerable to public and media scrutiny as it has operations in several locations around the world. Furthermore, a monolithic identity³ such as Shell risks being vulnerable to critique as it is associated with the brand as a whole. This was evident during the reputation crisis in the mid-1990s. Thusly, the negative associations linked with the brand in a particular part of the world could affect the brand of the whole organization.

Additionally, it could be a challenge to integrate reputation and branding efforts across the MNC due to the different contexts and local varieties. In terms of employer branding particularly, it could be a potential challenge if a MNC standardizes the process and practices that adhere to it, as it could have different effects and appeals depending on national- and local contexts. For instance, it may vary what is considered appealing among graduate students in Tanzania and Norway. On a macro level, this global-local tension is an eternal and seemingly timeless dilemma for MNCs. Nevertheless, it is a very interesting and relevant debate, and this study will also touch upon this issue in its discussion of challenges of employer branding.

1.2 Research questions

In this thesis, the following research questions will be discussed:

- *What are the motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell?*

³ Monolithic identities are associated with organizations that have a consistent identity mix across its businesses and branches, such as the same visual style and logo (Olins 2003).

- *How does A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding relate to the presumed institutionalized recipe on employer branding, and which challenges could arise?*
- *Which challenges related to employer branding could potentially arise in A/S Norske Shell as a result of being a part of a multinational organization?*

This study aims to discuss three research questions. The first research question seeks to identify the motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. In this study, motives and driving forces are viewed and applied as two closely related phenomena that account for an understanding of the intentions and justifications of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. Hence, motives and driving forces are not treated as distinctively separated phenomena. This question will be discussed from three perspectives; namely a modernist perspective, a social constructivist perspective and a pragmatic institutional perspective (Røvik 2007: chapter 2). The main aim of this study is not to discuss which of the perspectives that have the greatest explanatory power, but rather to use them as complementary lenses in order to gain a holistic understanding.

The second research question asks how the process of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell relates to the presumably institutionalized recipe on employer branding, and which challenges that could arise. Although this is a case study, and it is difficult to generalize the degree to which the recipe on employer branding actually has become institutionalized, this is a premise for the analysis. Røvik (2007: 16) defines institutionalized recipes as “[...] *recipes for how contemporary organizations should be designed, managed and led* [my translation]”. According to Røvik (2007: 16-20), institutionalized recipes have six features: they are many; they are ubiquitous; they often have an unclear history; they are pervasive; they are triggering reforms; and they have ambiguous effects.

HR practitioner literature describes employer branding as a process, and identifies certain steps that should be followed in order to become “successful”. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe employer branding as a three-step process, which is quite similar to the five-step process described by Universum (Heilmann et al. 2013; Parment and Dyhre 2009). A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding will be discussed and compared with the presumed recipe on employer branding so as to illuminate similarities and differences. Additionally, potential challenges with the approach will be discussed. This is particularly

interesting to research as there is limited literature on how organizations actually work with employer branding and how organizations relate to the seemingly institutionalized recipe (Edwards 2012: 189; Frandsen and Morsing 2009: 256; Martin and Groen-in't-Woud 2011: 170-171). This research gap is also emphasized by Røvik (2007: 31), who calls for more research on the “[...] *reception side* [my translation]” of organizational recipes and concepts.

The third research question addresses the potential challenges of employer branding as a result of being a part of a multinational organization. Although challenges of employer branding also will be illuminated in connection with the other research questions, the particular tension between standardization versus local tailoring of employer branding activities will be central to this part of the discussion. Institutional theory of the multinational firm as outlined by Westney (2005) will serve as an important theoretical foundation. This research question is particularly interesting in the context of A/S Norske Shell as it is a part of a large multinational organization, while at the same time being regarded as a separate entity *de jure*.

As previously stated, employer branding could be targeted both internally and externally. In order to delimit the scope of this study, it will mostly focus on measures of employer branding that are targeted toward potential employees; more specifically, graduate students. In addition to making the study more focused, this emphasis is also interesting because this is a candidate group that Shell uses substantial resources on. As such, this thesis focuses on the attraction of potential employees.

Hopefully, the thesis can be a valuable empirical contribution to the growing field of employer branding. As several authors, such as Heilmann et al. (2013: 283-284) and Martin and colleagues (2005: 76) have argued, there is a research-practice divide in the field of employer branding, and this study could contribute to help bridge some of this gap. ‘The realist turn’ in organization- and management studies implicates that one is more concerned with what is really going on in organizations (Reed 2005: 1621-1622), and employer branding is definitely a concept that several organizations are engaging in today. Although it can be viewed as a buzz-word and a trend or fashion-concept, employer branding is defining the organizational reality of several organizations, hence illustrating the actuality of the phenomenon. Additionally, several studies on employer branding have originated from business- and management schools, which could mean that the current academic portfolio is biased towards a discourse that emphasizes effectiveness on the expense of critical scrutiny

(Edwards 2010: 5-6). Much of the current literature has focused on the rational aspects and possible advantages of employer branding, but there are not so many studies focusing on the reception side and consequences of working with employer branding in organizations (Edwards 2012: 389-390). On the one hand, this study draws upon insights from institutional perspectives on organizations (Røvik 2007; Westney 2005). Simultaneously, the study draws upon a tripartite of functional, interpretive and critical perspectives on branding (Frandsen and Kjærgaard 2014). The functional perspective emphasizes the factors that could lead to effective and successful branding, whereas the interpretive perspective emphasizes the unique context, culture and distinctive characteristics of an organization. The critical perspective views branding as a manipulative, powerful and controlling process, and emphasizes the limited and problematic dimensions of it (Frandsen and Kjærgaard 2014: 652-653). The combination of the different perspectives could hopefully help to illuminate several, and perhaps new dimensions, of the concept of employer branding as set out by the research questions. Said in other words, this study adopts a ‘complementary strategy’ (cf. Roness 1997: 100) in that the different perspectives are combined in order to explore employer branding in more depth.

1.3 Shell: a multinational organization with a local presence

The Shell group is globally perceived as one of the most prominent and influential energy companies, and is present in more than 80 countries world-wide, currently employing approximately 90 000 employees (Shell International 2014a). The parent company of the Shell group is Royal Dutch Shell plc, which is headquartered in the Netherlands (Shell International 2014a). Thusly, Shell, refers to all companies that adhere to the group globally, although the national companies, such as A/S Norske Shell, are regarded as separate entities *de jure*. In this study, Shell will be used as an umbrella term for the global organization, and A/S Norske Shell will be used distinctively to refer to the Norwegian subsidiary.

Shell is vertically integrated, meaning that different businesses have management lines that cross national borders and units. Broadly, the businesses are divided in ‘upstream’, ‘downstream’ and ‘projects & technology’ (Shell International 2014b). Shell’s upstream business searches for and recovers oil and natural gas, whereas the downstream business manages the refining and marketing activities for oil products and chemicals (Shell

International 2014b). The projects & technology business manages the delivery of major projects and drives research and innovation with the aim of developing new technology (Shell International 2014b). It is mostly within these businesses that the vertical organization may lead to challenges. The complexity that the vertical integration constitutes implicates that it can be difficult to know where the decision-making authority is instituted; whether it is within the country or within the multinational line management. As argued later in this study, this could also have implications for the management of employer branding in the company.

According to Brand Finance (2014), Shell is considered the most highly valued energy brand, being ranked as number 12 among the world's leading brands in 2014. Internationally, Shell has a solid brand image. Additionally, it is by Universum (2014a) ranked as one of the world's top ten attractive employers among graduate engineers, based on student surveys in the world's 12 largest economies. However, Shell is not equally ranked in all countries where it has a presence, as the case of Norway illustrates. According to Universum, which has ranked employers in Norway based on student- and professional surveys, Statoil is perceived as the most attractive employer among both engineering students (Universum 2014b) and engineering professionals (Universum 2014c) in 2013. In the same survey, A/S Norske Shell is ranked as number six among engineering professionals (Universum 2014c) and as number 24 among engineering students (Universum 2014b). Clearly, Universum's surveys illustrate that there is a gap between how A/S Norske Shell is perceived among professionals and students in Norway, as well as how Shell is perceived across different countries.

According to an internal document, the Shell group strategy is “[...] *to become the world's most innovative and competitive energy company*” (Internal document 1, 2014); (cf. Shell International 2014c). Shell also aspires to be one of the world's most respected and attractive companies in its field through an employer of choice policy (Internal document 2, 2014). During the last years, A/S Norske Shell has recruited among 20-30 graduate students annually into the Shell Graduate Programme, with the majority of the students having technical, i.e. engineering, backgrounds. The Shell Graduate Programme is considered a key arena in which the company should attract and develop “[...] *world-class talent*” (Shell Youtube 2014). As a graduate student, the route into Shell is either via an ‘assessed internship’ or via a ‘Shell Recruitment Day’. In order to attract the right talents, the company has targeted selective universities in which it focuses its recruitment and marketing activities. Not surprisingly, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) is one of the targeted universities

in Norway. Technical students at NTNU are generally very attractive to A/S Norske Shell, as well as to the other competitors in the oil and gas industry. Hence, it becomes important to be positively differentiated from the other competitors. In terms of targeted employer branding activities with the aim of building the reputation of Shell as a great place to work among technical students, the company has developed and implemented a strategy named the ‘Shell Campus Ambassador Programme’ (Internal document 3, 2014). The initiative aims to attract high-achieving graduate students by building relationships between them and Shell employees who have formerly been studying at the same university. This is a strategy that has been developed and executed globally (Internal document 3, 2014). Other global measures targeted toward technical students are the Shell Eco-marathon and Shell Ideas 360; global competitions in which students are encouraged to develop efficient fuel and innovative ideas related to energy, water or food (Internal document 2, 2014). These global measures are intended to portray the innovative aspects of Shell, which is an important part of what the company wishes to communicate and express through its employer brand.

1.4 Structure of the study

The next chapter will contextualize and place the concept of employer branding in relation with reputation management and the branding discipline. After elaborating on the antecedents and developments of employer branding, the paper discusses the modernist-, social constructivist-, and pragmatic institutional perspectives on organizations (Røvik 2007: chapter 2), and develops theoretical expectations with regard to the research questions. A separate discussion of institutional theory of the multinational organization is also included. The fourth chapter discusses the methodological approach and issues, emphasizing the strengths, challenges and ethical dimensions of the study. This chapter is followed by the discussion and analysis, logically structured in line with the research questions. The study naturally ends with a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

2 The concept of employer branding: antecedents and developments

The literature on employer branding is fragmented and mostly associated with practitioner contributions, which results in a need to discuss the antecedents and developments of the phenomenon. Employer branding could be seen as a distinctive concept, but is closely linked with reputation management and the branding discipline. Reputation management and branding are two related phenomena that are easily confused and mixed interchangeably (Brønn and Ihlen 2009: 15; Ettenson and Knowles 2008: 19-21; Røvik 2007: chapter 9). Moreover, concepts such as product branding, corporate branding and employer branding are all attached to the field of branding, but it is important to clarify the relationship and differences between them, as well as between reputation management and the branding discipline. In this section, the concept of employer branding and the presumed institutionalized recipe on it, will be discussed in relation with the literature on reputation management and branding.

2.1 Reputation management

All of the named concepts have in common that they emphasize the need to adjust to the perceptions of the environment in some way or the other. The idea of reputation management can at least be traced back to Fombrun (1996), who argued that organizations should be aware of the environment's perception of them, and seek to influence these perceptions in a positive direction. Fombrun (1996: chapter 1) also emphasized that an organization's reputation is build and maintained over a long time-period, whereas an organization's image may change more often over shorter time-periods. Thusly, image could be viewed as the immediate impression of an organization (Røvik 2007: 195). Fombrun and van Riel (2004: chapter 1) distinguish between reputation management and branding in that the former can be seen as an evaluation and monitoring of whether the organization can fulfill the expectations of the stakeholders, whereas branding is about catching the attention of the environment. Stakeholders of an organization are “[...] any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives” (Freeman 1984: 46). The stakeholder concept has evolved to include a broad range of actors, whereas earlier it tended to focus on shareholders that had a direct impact on the economic performance of the

organization (Freeman 1984). In reputation management, one may attempt to narrow the gap between how an organization perceives itself and how stakeholders perceive it. Furthermore, Brønn and Ihlen (2009: 15) distinguish between the building of a reputation (the Norwegian *omdømmebygging*) and reputation management (the Norwegian *omdømmestyring*), and their premise is that organizations are unable to control or manipulate their reputation, but they can try to affect it through their expression of values and behavior. Thusly, reputation management can be seen as the efforts that an organization utilizes in order to enhance its organizational reputation among a variety of stakeholders, although mainly external ones (Schultz et al. 2012: 4). Reputation management has traditionally been anchored within the function of corporate communication and PR (Schultz et al. 2012: 4-5). In reputation management one assumes that the reputation can be managed, although it may be a difficult accomplishment. Consequently, reputation management is about being proactive; namely constructing a positive and favorable reputation, as well as protecting the reputation of the company. The balance of being proactive and protective at the same time is critical in order to gain the support of the stakeholders. It is also important to note that it can take a long time to build a good and sustainable reputation, but that it can quickly crumble as a result of critical incidents, such as the Shell imbroglio during the mid-1990s illustrated.

2.2 Corporate branding

Christensen and Morsing (2008: chapter 3) trace the development of the branding discipline back to American stock farming, where farmers marked their cattle in order to separate the herds from each other, hence preventing theft. Wally Olins (2003) illustrates how branding has become more specialized and dispersed over time. The American Marketing Association defined a 'brand' in the 1960s as:

A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (as cited in Heding et al. 2009: 9).

Although branding traditionally referred to product branding in a marketing context, organizations have started to brand themselves as unified actors, both to the general public and to specific target groups. This can be linked with the parallel development of corporate communication, which is built on the assumption that organizations should act and speak with

one body and voice. With the branding concept, corporate communication is made an identity project where the ultimate goal is to portray the organization as a consistent organizational body (Christensen and Morsing 2008: chapter 3). Due to this dynamic development, the branding discipline has evolved to become a multidimensional and interdisciplinary domain that bears close relationship with reputation management. Byrkjeflot (2010: 7-10) discusses the driving forces of reputation management and branding, and links the development with the expansion of management models founded in a neoliberal mindset, as well as the increased emphasis on immaterial values at the expense of market economic values. In her highly normative critique of branding, representing the critical perspective on branding, Naomi Klein (2002) views it as a manipulative, aggressive endeavor and claim that the goal of branding is no longer product association, but identification and integration with the branded idea; the brand has become a free-standing idea in itself, and the product is the image. Following Klein's (2002) line of thought, Shell is no longer first and foremost an oil company, but a sustainable and responsible company that aims to solve the world's future energy challenges through innovation. Klein (2002) calls for self-determination in the branded world, and she also predicts the end of brands as a result of anti-branding movements "[...] *sowing the seeds of a genuine alternative to corporate rule*" (Klein 2002: xxiii). Although Klein has been criticized for the validity of the latter claim (House 2007: 10-11), her analysis contributes with an historical account of the development and impact of the branding discipline on society.

Within the branding literature, one can broadly differentiate between product branding, employer branding and corporate branding. Product branding has its disciplinary roots in marketing, where the focus is placed on separate products and where the customers are seen as the most important stakeholders (Byrkjeflot 2010: 5-6). Furthermore, product brands are often short-lived and adapted to customer trends, thusly promoting values that are contrived (Birkstedt 2012: 43). Conversely, corporate branding places the focus on the organization and regards all stakeholders of the organization, internal and external, as important. In fact, Ind (2001: chapter 3) argues that the most important group of stakeholders in corporate branding is the employees of the organization, as they interact and build relationships with other external stakeholders. They constitute the interface between internal and external environments, and if they 'live the brand', meaning that they "[...] *internalize brand values*" (Ind 2001: 38), the organization could have a competitive advantage in terms of its reputation vis-à-vis competitors. The corporate brand is of strategic importance to the organization, and

is viewed in a long-term perspective. As Birkstedt (2012: 43) illustrates, the disciplinary roots of product branding are in marketing, whereas the literature on corporate branding stems from various influences from research in organizational theory, strategy, economics and sociology, as well as design and graphic arts.

2.2.1 Linking reputation management and the branding discipline

In line with the discussion above, corporate branding and reputation management can be regarded as relatively similar concepts as they focus on the whole organization with regards to its environment. Although some would argue that reputation management and branding could be seen as distinctive fields of knowledge, there are also those who would use those two as synonyms to a large extent (Birkstedt 2012: chapter 2). Fombrun and van Riel (2004), as well as Røvik (2007: chapter 9), argue that branding is a constituent of reputation management, whereas Kapferer (2008: 27-29) argues that reputation management is an introverted activity, and that organizations should aim to become corporate brands instead of focusing on building and protecting their reputation. As the review of the literature on the field has illustrated, the different concepts can be interpreted to be in a reciprocal relation with one another. It is also evident that reputation management is traditionally externally oriented, whereas corporate branding is both externally and internally oriented (Schultz et al. 2012: 3-6). It seems reasonable to regard reputation management and corporate branding as two scientific conversations going on at the same time, talking about similar issues, but having different ways of approaching the management of an organization's reputation. Said in other words, the ways in which organizations aspire to influence their brands and reputations differ (Schultz et al. 2012: 4). This is a result of the fact that reputation management has its roots within corporate communication and PR, whereas corporate branding has its roots within marketing. Additionally, the influence of the 'branding logic' (Frandsen and Kjærgaard 2014: 641) has contributed to pull reputation management closer to corporate branding, and one could argue that there is a shift in both traditions to focus more on the balance between internal and external perceptions. Nonetheless, it is important that the various brands are in agreement with the corporate brand (Christiaans 2013: 17-18). Thusly, both the product brand and the employer brand must be consistent with the corporate brand. If the development of the employer brand is isolated and separated from the corporate brand, this could lead to the fragmentation of the brand portfolio (Hatch and Schultz 2009: 117). The corporate brand thus

functions as an integrative umbrella of an organization's brands, representing and unifying the overall identity of the organization.

In the following, the focus turns to the more specific concept of employer branding, which can be seen as an essential element of the corporate brand. The main difference seems to be that whereas corporate branding tends to focus on several stakeholders that are believed to have an impact on the organization, employer branding is specifically targeted towards potential and current employees, hence narrowing down the scope of actors.

2.3 Employer branding

Employer branding is a relatively new field in academic research, although it has been an important part of HR strategy and practice in global organizations for more than a decade (Martin and Groen-in't-Woud 2011: 170). The concept is often described as a fusion between marketing and HR-practices (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004: 501). International HRM researchers are seeing employer branding as a trend among MNCs as an important tool for creating a sense of 'corporateness'⁴, and as a means of differentiating themselves in labor markets (Martin and Groen-in't-Woud 2011: 171). Being 'corporate' means that an organization aims to be perceived as unified and integrated, which is believed to be important in order to gain trust and legitimacy among stakeholders. The concept of employer branding crosses several disciplines within and between organizational theory, marketing, strategy and corporate communication, and there is no accredited single theory that accounts for the full complexity of the phenomenon (Christiaans 2013: 17). According to Ambler and Barrow's (1996) article, employer branding is all about creating an impression that the organization is a great place to work. Ambler and Barrow's (1996: 185) conclusion is that cooperation between marketing and HR-functions are essential in the process of becoming an attractive employer. By recruiting talented employees, the organization could enhance its reputation and strengthen the brand as an employer. Thusly, the employer brand can be regarded as the final outcome of all brand-related activities, whereas employer branding can be seen as the process to reach this outcome.

⁴ 'Corporateness' describes the trend among organizations to achieve a greater sense of corporate identity, corporate governance, corporate leadership and corporate social responsibility (Martin and Groen-in't-Woud 2011: 171).

Employer branding can be linked with a normative discourse, and the concept can be traced back to the periods of the 1980s and 1990s; eras that emphasized the importance of organizational culture, values and identity (Barley and Kunda 1992: 381-384). In *Principles of Marketing*, Philip Kotler (1980) argued that employers should regard their employees as customers and consumers of jobs and careers. Furthermore, Albert and Whetten (1985) launched their influential article on organizational identity that resulted in increased emphasis on the symbolic dimensions of organizations. Albert and Whetten (1985) set out an important premise that relates to employer branding; namely that organizations are engaged in the construction and management of identity. There are several factors that account for the cultural shift in the 1980s such as decreased belief in instrumental rationality; the need to get rid of mid-level managers; technological development; increased difficulties of controlling employees; globalization and fluctuating interfaces (Sørhaug 2004: chapter 1 and chapter 4). Du Gay (2000) and Martin et al. (2005: 77-79) connect the branding discipline with the ‘culture-excellence’ literature that dominated management- and organizational discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, employer branding could also be seen as a new performance discourse for HR, as one is trying to control the employees through values and culture (Martin et al. 2005: 84). Hence, employer branding fits with a rational approach. As Gideon Kunda (2006: 5) illustrates in his ethnographic study of engineering culture, quoting a manager in a large engineer organization; “[t]he idea is to educate people without them knowing it. Have the religion and not know how they ever got it!”. From a rational perspective, it is believed that employer branding is a tool to solve organizational challenges, and if implemented successfully, it would have the intended effects. The conduct of employer branding is thus perceived as a static and controllable process. Consequently, employer branding could be linked with both a normative and a rational discourse.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) illustrate the ways in which organizations try to construct a distinctive and unique employer identity that workers can identify with. They define the employer brand as “[...] a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004: 502). Consistent with their line of thought, the importance of establishing elements that separate the organization from its competitors are emphasized; such as uniqueness, advantages, identity, values and behavior. In order to become an attractive employer one has to be special and unique, while at the same time not being too different from the other actors in the field. This could be seen as a paradox, and the balance between

conformity and uniqueness is not necessarily easy to manage. Said in the words of the Norwegian social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2007: 146):

The more similar we become, the more different we try to be. Paradoxically, however, the more different we try to be, the more similar we become – since most of us try to be different in roughly the same way worldwide.

Although Eriksen's (2007) quote must be seen in the context of individual identity in a globalized world, the argument could as well be applied to organizations. According to organizational institutionalists (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Sahlin and Wedlin 2008), the process of isomorphism may lead organizations operating in the same organizational field to copy and imitate each other's practices. Additionally, organizations could be viewed as trend or fashion followers (Abrahamson 1996). However, it is held that each organization has central, distinctive and enduring characteristics, i.e. an organizational identity (Albert and Whetten 1985), which cannot easily be transferred or copied between organizations. The danger of copying other organizations is that one does not take full account of the local context, and consultants and other institutional carriers may get too much power in defining good and bad practices. For instance, it may not be a single and universal recipe on employer branding that works in all contexts. Additionally, simple and homogeneous models may not take sufficient regard to the context, complexity, diversity and development in specific organizations (Byrkjeflot 1999). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 502-503) therefore emphasize that the values the organizations portray must be consistent and authentic. Organizations that glorify their employer brand and promise conditions beyond the reality, risk being revealed and neglected by current and potential employees as their expectations fail to be met. An accurate and honest description of the employer brand is a prerequisite for succeeding with employer branding, according to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: 507). It is also important to note that employer branding activities should be managed as a part of a long-term strategy. It does not stop with the recruitment and on-boarding of new employees; they need to be motivated and developed throughout their career. Parment and Dyhre (2009: 45-48) argue that employer branding activities should be maintained also in economically difficult times. According to them, several organizations tend to cut in employer branding activities during economic downturns, but this is a situation in which it becomes even more important to engage in such activities, as the consequences of not dealing with it could damage both the reputation of the organization as an employer, as well as add to decreased motivation of the current employees.

2.3.1 The recipe on employer branding

HR practitioner literature describes employer branding as a process, and Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that there are three phases. Firstly, the organization must develop an employer value proposition (EVP) by using information about the organization's culture, identity, values and management style, as well as external research of stakeholder perceptions. Intended to be a true EVP, it offers the central message conveyed by the brand. The EVP should constitute the particular characteristics that differentiate the organization from other competitors and state why it is a "[...] *great place to work*" (Christiaans 2013: 12). The EVP should also express the organization's vision; namely the purpose, rationale and future vision, meant to inspire and engage current and potential employees (Dowling 2001: 67-86). This is seen as important in order to legitimize the organization. It is possible to develop distinctive EVPs to different target groups, as these stakeholders may differ in needs and values. Thusly, the EVPs could be segmented, but is important that they are in agreement with the corporate brand.

Thereafter, the values must be distributed and marketed toward the target groups through relevant channels and media. It is important to identify the target groups so that one can sharpen the value-offer in line with the needs of the specific groups. Thirdly, the recipe states that the values must be incorporated internally in the organization, and the goal is that the employees will internalize these values. Internal marketing of the employer brand could potentially help incorporate the values in the organizational culture, according to this view. However, the emphasis on adjusting the employer brand to different target groups raises the question as to how a brand can say one thing to one group of people (for instance potential employees), and something else to another (for instance consumers), particularly when individuals may belong to both groups (Hatch and Schultz 2009: 117-118). This is a dilemma that the recipe on employer branding avoids to illuminate. Furthermore, the segmentation of the EVPs does not seem to harmonize with the ideal of corporate communication. A potential pitfall is that individuals who belong to several groups may witness conflicting messages. For instance, the same individual might be an employee, an investor, a local community member, a customer, and an environmental activist. Thusly, an individual may hold different images depending on the role and situation. Hatch and Schultz (2009: 118) illustrate how the oil company BP started to brand itself as a 'green' oil company in the early 2000s, but that this was viewed as false and inconsistent among the public as it became evident that most of its

extraction and management practices not were environmentally sustainable. Particularly, the ‘Deepwater Horizon’ oil spill scandal of 2010 caused massive harm to the ‘green’ reputation of BP (cf. The Guardian 2014). This example illustrates that the brand has to be trustworthy and authentic.

The research and consulting firm Universum has created a five-step process for employer branding (Heilmann et al. 2013: 289-290), which is quite similar to Backhaus and Tikoo’s (2004) approach. The first step in the process is researching, in order to understand the needs and motivations of the target groups, how the organization is perceived by potential and current employees, as well as mapping the external market and other competitors (Heilmann et al. 2013: 289). The second phase defines the EVP, and should reflect the competitive advantage and distinctive characteristics of the organization. The third phase is the development of a communication strategy, which is based on research findings and a defined EVP. The organization can use the EVP to emphasize the most attractive factors and be consistent in employer communications (Heilmann et al. 2013: 289). The fourth step is to express the EVP with the right words and images so that it is consistent with the organizational identity, the corporate brand and other branding efforts. Finally, the fifth step is to implement all of the measures and to observe closely what works or needs adjustment (Heilmann et al. 2013: 290).

One could argue that both recipes view employer branding as a linear process, arguing that an organization will become successful if it follows the recipe step-by-step. However, the assumption that employer branding is a linear, static and controllable process, could fail to account for contextual and situational factors that may affect the process. For instance, both internal and external stakeholder perceptions may change during the process, resulting in a decoupling between actual motivations and the communicated EVP.

The recipe on employer branding could be summarized as followed (inspired by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Heilmann et al. (2013) and Parment and Dyhre (2009)):

- 1) Research and map the internal and external perceptions of the organization
- 2) Define the EVP on the basis of the research
- 3) Develop a communication- and marketing strategy
- 4) Express the EVP in line with the corporate brand
- 5) Monitor, measure and adjust the EVP to targeted stakeholder perceptions

Presumably, the recipe on employer branding identifies how an organization can become successful, and there are several implications that can be drawn from the previous discussion. Firstly, the EVP needs to be a trustworthy and authentic representation of the organization and the employment offer, and it should be rooted in external and internal perceptions of the organization. Moreover, it is held that employees could be differentiated from each other and divided into subgroups, for instance based on age, seniority and job type, and that the various groups have different needs and wants. The implication is therefore that one needs to be aware of the target groups and the possible heterogeneity in interests and values (Edwards 2012: 399-402). The employer brand should include transactional, functional and symbolic elements that constitute the employment offer (cf. Ambler and Barrow 1996: 186). Thusly, employer branding activities should combine and balance rational and symbolic elements. Said in other words, the employer brand should both appeal to the 'head' and the 'heart'. Values appealing to the 'head' could for instance be economic pay and benefits, career development and prestige, whereas values that appeal to the 'heart' could be the organizational culture, work-life balance, and supportive management. In fact, Martin (2007: 18-22), as well as Frandsen and Morsing (2009: 258-262), argue that symbolic aspects of the employer brand, i.e. the 'heart', carry more weight than rational aspects, i.e. the 'head'. At the same time, the EVP should express the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the organization that differentiates it from competitors. It is also important that the EVP manages to catch and portray the core essence of what the organization wishes to communicate. If it becomes too general, the risk is that the organization is not perceived as unique and distinctive. Employer branding activities should be consistent and in line with other branding efforts. It is also emphasized that the HR-, recruitment-, and marketing departments should cooperate in the process because the organization needs to communicate in an integrated and consistent manner. Finally, the process of employer branding should be monitored and compared against competitors, as well as among other stakeholders, so as to adjust it when necessary.

2.3.2 The practical value of employer branding: explaining the interest in the concept

According to HR practitioner literature, employer branding has several potential advantages. First and foremost, it could be a tool to enhance the organization's reputation as an attractive employer among potential and current employees. Thusly, the employer brand could be an important differentiator in talent management (Bhatnagar and Srivastava 2008: 35). Employer

branding could also contribute to motivate and engage current employees as they feel pride to work for the organization and can identify with the espoused organizational values.

Ultimately, the employees could internalize the organization's culture and values so that they become a part of their personal identity. This is a scenario that could be seen through the lens of social identity theory (cf. Ashforth and Mael 1989). Tenets of social identity theory include the idea that people have a natural desire to want to link themselves to social groups and that these groups can become part of a person's identity. Thusly, the employees can become employer 'brand ambassadors'; promoting the company's image, identity and values (cf. Ind 2001: chapter 2 and 3). Research investigating identification suggests that people have a need to maintain a positive self regard in connection with their identity (Edwards 2010: 12). One may also define organizational identification as the employees linking themselves to the characteristics of the organization or "*[t]he degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization*" (Edwards 2010: 12). Additionally, employer branding can become an important tool in committing and aligning the employees with the values of the organization. Thusly, it can be seen as a form for organizational- and management control. From a functional perspective, employer branding could be seen as an effective tool as the top management may dictate and control the employees in the desired direction. However, this also raises ethical questions about the intentions of employer branding, as it could be used to manipulate the employees. These concerns are relevant as there is a potential that "*[...] employees are being considered as merely a means to an end, as a device or vehicle to achieve further customer loyalty*" (Edwards 2012: 405). The organization's attempt to ensure that the brand values are internalized by the employees and that they 'live the brand' is to some degree a reach after parts of the employees' personality and dignity that traditionally have been considered private (Edwards 2012: 405-406). These concerns are being debated in the critical perspective on branding (Frandsen and Kjærgaard 2014: 652-653).

3 The institutional paradigm

The previous section has thoroughly discussed the antecedents and developments of employer branding in relation with reputation management and the branding discipline, placing it in both an academic and a practical framework. A particular emphasis has been on the presumed institutionalized recipe on employer branding, which forms an important foundation for discussing the second research question in this study. However, all of the research questions are not covered by a single theory or perspective, which means that the discussion and analysis will draw on several perspectives in order to gain a holistic understanding. The first research question seeks to identify the motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. This question will be discussed from three approaches that could complement each other; namely a modernist perspective, a social constructivist perspective and a pragmatic institutional perspective (Røvik 2007: chapter 2). The third research question addresses the potential challenges of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell as a result of being a part of a multinational organization. Institutional theory of the multinational organization as outlined by Westney (2005) will be an important theoretical cornerstone with regards to this question, as it recognizes the various and potentially conflicting isomorphic pulls that the local branch of a MNC could be subject to. Firstly, the modernist-, social constructivist-, and pragmatic institutional perspectives will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the institutional theory of the multinational organization.

3.1 The modernist perspective

According to Røvik (2007: 49), the central tenet of the modernist perspective is that it assumes that there is a rational logic driving organizations. This perspective has been dominating in organizational studies the last 100 years, and includes different schools and traditions such as scientific management, decision theory, contingency theory and neorational theory (Røvik 2007: chapter 2). Røvik (2007: 47) argues that there are three common denominators adhering to the modernist perspective: progress optimism, the belief in organizing and the organization, as well as scientific- and knowledge optimism. These denominators add to a rational logic of organizations, emphasizing the opportunity to instrumentally plan and implement measures as intended. Consequently, the modernist perspective has a static ontological view, resulting in a belief that as long as one plans

rationality, the initiatives could be implemented successfully. The basis of the knowledge optimism is the notion of cumulative accumulation of knowledge; one constantly acquires and develops new and “better” knowledge that could be used as universal principles in the management and leadership of organizations (Røvik 2007: 47).

The modernist perspective would argue that the increased demand for organizational recipes, such as employer branding, reflect the emergence of the modern organizational society (Røvik 2007: 49). Due to the fact that several entities have started to define themselves as organizations, it is also assumed that they need the same type of solutions (Røvik 2007: 49). Additionally, the intensified global competition has contributed to drive a demand for universal “best practices”. The underlying assumption is that the recipes could be transferred from one organization to another, so that observed positive results could be reproduced. Through rational and comparative techniques, such as benchmarking, it is believed that it is possible to transfer universal recipes and models within and across organizational- and national borders. From a modernist perspective, the recipes are perceived as appropriate tools for “[...] *rational leadership and organizational design [my translation]*” (Røvik 2007: 49). A modernist would argue that implementation should be driven top-down, and as such, the perspective accounts for “[...] *instrumental installation [my translation]*” (Røvik 2007: 50).

3.1.1 Theoretical expectations

From a modernist perspective, one of the motives of employer branding would be to meet the business goals of the organization, for instance when it comes to the attraction and recruitment of employees. One imperative would be that A/S Norske Shell works with employer branding because the top management, i.e. Shell centrally, requires A/S Norske Shell to do so, as it is a presumed rational tool to achieve business goals. Hence, one would expect that employer branding is neatly related with the performance of the organization due to the assumption of a link between intention and outcome. Through the modernist lens, employer branding is a tool to solve a specific organizational problem; namely a problem with attracting and recruiting graduate students into A/S Norske Shell, or, to achieve a desired future vision of the organization. Also, one would expect employer branding to be top-down driven, and that the different activities are in logical coherence with one another. Thusly, the employer branding activities in A/S Norske Shell should be perceived to form a consistent and holistic unity aligned with organizational “needs”. One would also expect that the

intended effects of the employer branding initiatives are met due to the presumed causation between intention and outcome. Finally, one could expect that the recipe on employer branding is transferred effectively and frictionless within Shell as a MNC.

3.2 The social constructivist perspective

The social constructivist perspective is in many ways perceived as the polar opposite of the modernist perspective. According to Røvik (2007: 47), this approach became particularly prominent in the 1960s, and is lodged in neoinstitutional theory and post-modern contributions. It is also a common reference to the management fashion tradition (Røvik 2007: 48). As opposed to the modernist perspective, the social constructivist lens views the world as socially constructed and emphasizes the importance of context in shaping and constituting the organizational reality. Not only the external environment, but also the organizations themselves, contribute to construct the reality. Secondly, social constructivists are skeptical to a positivistic organizational science as they believe that organizations are context-dependent social constructions (Røvik 2007: 51). Scholars adhering to this tradition do not interpret organizations as pure tools to achieve certain ends. Rather, they emphasize that organizations are arenas for development and interpretation of symbols and meanings. A social constructivist would be skeptical to the presumed rational and instrumental installation of concepts in organizations. The modernist view that “[...] *transfers of best practice [within MNCs] could be conceived as replications of organizational routines*” (Szulanski 1996: 28), neglects the possibility of local adaptations, editing and transformations of concepts in particular contexts.

A premise for the social constructivist lens is that the dispersion of organizational recipes, templates and prototypes (Sahlin and Wedlin 2008) are constructed and defined as a “need” in the marketplace and external environments, and that organizations have to adjust to the expectations of being perceived as modern entities. As such, the motive of implementing organizational recipes may be to fulfill norms in the public environment. Consequently, the organizations are themselves driving the demand for recipes, as well as shaping the environment and context in which they operate. DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) theory of homogenization predicts that organizations will become more similar as a result of isomorphism. However, the neoinstitutional notion of decoupling means that the ideas that are adopted are not necessarily used internally, but rather implemented to satisfy the

surroundings. Hence, one risks that recipes and ideas are detached from the organizational “needs”, and they could lead to goal displacement as well as unintended consequences (Merton 1936). Conversely, organizations could consciously try to keep the institutionalized recipes detached from organizational practices, because the recipes only are seen as symbols to adjust to the expectations of the environment. One should neither deny that recipes may in fact contribute to change organizational practices, and not only be subject to decoupling (Larsen and Kvålshaugen 2008: 106-107). Moreover, it has been argued that the process of adopting organizational recipes may not only result in homogenization, but also lead to heterogeneity and divergence, which is illustrated in the American neoinstitutional tradition (Røvik 2007: 51-52).

Seen through the social constructivist lens, popular recipes would not necessarily be based on experience and knowledge such as in the modernist perspective, but rather symbols that organizations demand “[...] *in order to demonstrate adherence to values such as efficiency, rationality and renovation [my translation]*” (Røvik 2007: 51). According to Meyer and Rowan (1977: 344-346) there are the strong Western ideals of progress and rationality that form the basis for the exaggerated belief in rationalized recipes and ideas. The institutionalized elements are perceived as symbols of progress and rationality and they are institutionalized as rule-like social facts (Røvik 2007: 51); i.e. taken for granted as “right” and effective ways of organizing and leading. The social authorization of a particular idea may be more important than the actual effects of it. Consultancies and management gurus can be said to be important institutional carriers of these ideas, and the more they manage to construct the ideas as unique, exclusive and indispensable, the more the chance to succeed (Abrahamson 1996; Røvik 2007: 51). As opposed to modernists, social constructivists are not so concerned with trying to identify universal standards and “best practices” within and between organizations. Rather, they are occupied with how ideas become dominating in certain contexts and fields. Social constructivists would argue that the aim of implementing recipes and ideas would be to gain legitimacy and trust (Røvik 2007: 51).

3.2.1 Theoretical expectations

From a social constructivist perspective, one of the main driving forces of employer branding would be to adjust to the expectations of the environment. Thusly, the motive is to gain trust and legitimacy. Employer branding would gain legitimacy because it is perceived as a “right”

recipe on how to attract, develop and retain potential and current employees. As such, the recipe on employer branding gives a problem definition, as well as offers a solution to the presumed problem. However, there may not need to be a link between employer branding and organizational “needs”. In fact, A/S Norske Shell might work with employer branding just because it feels obliged to do so due to the pressure of the external environment. The fact that one may assume that the surroundings demands that one should work with employer branding, implicates that A/S Norske Shell could be constructing the social reality itself. As such, the conduct of employer branding might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. One would also expect that A/S Norske Shell copies other organizations that it views as successful, both in the domestic and the global environment. Additionally, one would expect that A/S Norske Shell is very concerned with public rankings that illustrate how it is perceived in various environments, implicating that certain consultancies have a defining power when it comes to measuring successful employer branding. Consequently, the driving force of employer branding may be to promote and express the brand and identity of A/S Norske Shell; activities conforming to the expectations of the external environment.

3.3 The pragmatic institutional perspective

The modernist- and the social constructivist perspectives are often interpreted to offer polarized and dichotomous explanations (Røvik 2007: 53). However, the perspectives do not need to be seen as mutually excluding. Røvik (2007: 52-53) argues that the pragmatic institutional perspective operates in the tension between the modernist- and the social constructivist lenses. One of the main tasks is to try to reveal and discuss potential ambiguities and concatenated logics. As a research approach, this perspective is empirically driven. A pragmatic position recognizes that popular recipes and ideas could be tools that have instrumental effects, but also that they could be socially constructed symbols with legitimizing effects. According to Røvik (2007: 53), popular organizational recipes are first and foremost symbols of modernity and rationality; stories about how good they are as tools, which is decisive for their legitimizing force as symbols of renovation and prosperousness. Røvik (2007: 53) stresses that concepts should be seen as developed within a “[...] *reality mode [my translation]*”, so as to account for practical implications and effects. One may criticize the perspective for simply combining the insights from the modernist- and the social constructivist perspectives, and for being relative in that it incorporates so many explanatory

factors that it could explain almost everything. In fact, the approach may become so ‘thick’ that it fails to account for the most significant explanatory factors. In that case, one risks that the research becomes relative and infertile (Jenssen 2008). Notwithstanding, the pragmatic institutional perspective could be regarded as an approach that aims to combine different theories, that through the voice of Røvik (2007) not should be treated as solely independent and mutually excluding approaches. It could also be understood as an attempt to be constructive and outcome-oriented, in line with the pragmatic tradition. Moreover, the translation aspect of the perspective accounts for a pragmatic understanding. Although Røvik (2007: 56-57) argues that the perspective is useful in developing theory, the perspective is in this thesis applied in order to gain a holistic understanding of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell.

The pragmatic institutional perspective bears a relationship with the philosophical pragmatic tradition, as developed by influential scholars such as Peirce, James and Dewey (Røvik 2007: 55). The sharp distinction between ideas and organizational practices is significantly less emphasized in studies adhering to the pragmatic institutional perspective, as opposed to the clear distinction made in for instance American neoinstitutional contributions (Røvik 2007: 55). The pragmatic institutional approach further develops the notion of knowledge transfer as a form for translation, as it was set out by the French-Scandinavian tradition in the 1990s (Røvik 2007: 55). The adoption of organizational recipes will follow a dual logic according to the pragmatic institutional perspective. This means that organizations will see themselves both as rational actors aiming to solve “real” organizational problems, while at the same time being motivated to adopt recipes due to their symbolic force as symbols of modernity. The recipes can be interpreted as symbols of rationality and modernity, meaning that the view of how effective they are as tools, is decisive for their ability to be legitimizing symbols of renewal and progress (Røvik 2007: 53).

The assumption that employer branding could be both a tool and a symbol relates to the organization’s translation of the concept. Firstly, the concept has to be interpreted and contextualized in the specific organization. Røvik (2007: 56) compares his translation theory with the translation of languages, and emphasizes that it is about preserving the meaning between different contexts. As with the translation of languages, the potential challenge of adopting an organizational recipe or concept relates to the questions of how they are interpreted and understood in the particular context. One is also concerned with how the ideas

or concepts may affect the organizations once they are implemented. Røvik (2007: 57) emphasizes “[...] *translation competence* [my translation]” as a decisive factor for whether recipes or concepts are to be successfully adopted and translated. The idea of employer branding and the practical usage of the concept do not exist independent of each other, but are linked in complex ways.

3.3.1 Theoretical expectations

Rather than seeing the motives and driving forces of employer branding to either adhere to a rational logic or a symbolic logic, the pragmatic institutional perspective recognizes that both logics may be at play simultaneously. One would expect that the intention with employer branding is to solve a real organizational “problem”, but at the same time have a distinct value as a symbol of renewal and progress conforming to the public norms and expectations. Thusly, employer branding is a tool with instrumental effects, as well as a socially constructed symbol with legitimizing effects both internally and externally. As the idea of employer branding is translated and adopted in the Shell group, one would also expect it to be locally adjusted in A/S Norske Shell to fit with the particular context, although dependent on “[...] *translation competence*” (Røvik 2007: 57). Additionally, one could say that this perspective acknowledges the possibility of potential power struggles within organizations that relate to how ideas and concepts could or should be implemented; thusly between Shell globally and A/S Norske Shell locally. Hence, the translator(s) has a defining power in shaping the organizational reality and the direction of the implementation in the organization. Whereas the modernist perspective only recognizes moderate local adaptation, the pragmatic institutional perspective would argue that the idea of employer branding is characterized by continuous translation as it is manifested in the organization and potentially becomes institutionalized.

3.4 The multinational organization and institutional theory

The third research question particularly addresses the potential challenges of employer branding as a result of being a part of a multinational organization. Institutional theory of the multinational firm as outlined by Westney (2005) provides a fertile theoretical framework for discussing this question as it emphasizes the various and potentially conflicting isomorphic pulls that a local subsidiary such as A/S Norske Shell might be subject to. Most MNCs, such

as Shell, span both countries and industries, meaning that they are likely to be subject to different and contradictory pulls in the environments in which they operate.

The MNC consists of a number of subsidiaries which are located in particular national contexts. Each of these environments might share some characteristics with other national environments due to interdependencies and cross-linkages (Ghoshal and Westney 2005: 8), but they are also likely to differ on some areas. According to Ghoshal and Westney (2005: 8), existing theory seems to deal with this relation in two ways; it can either view the MNC as a single entity facing a common global environment, or it can be viewed as consisting of several subunits, each operating in a distinctive national environment that is independent of the environments of the other units. Ghoshal and Westney (2005: 8) argue that neither of the views are satisfactory; the former view ignores the potential differences across national borders, whereas the latter view ignores the similarities and interdependencies. Conversely, the argument is made that the environment could be defined as an organizational field of interacting organizations, which affect the structure and behaviors of the actors operating in the field through isomorphic processes (Ghoshal and Westney 2005: chapter 1).

As previously stated, one of the main challenges of the MNC is the dilemma of balancing the need to integrate and standardize practices across different countries, while at the same time recognizing the various local contexts (Aaker and Joachimstahler 1999: 144). This can be referred to as the globalization versus localization debate in the context of the MNC. A common assumption is that the more value the subsidiary adds locally, and the more dominant local managers are in the organization, the more likely the subsidiary is to adopt local rather than parent company patterns (Westney 2005: 58-59). The degree to which the MNC adopts local organizational patterns in its subsidiaries can be framed in a cultural and political perspective (Westney 2005: 58-59). The cultural frame emphasizes the importance of adjusting to the local cultures and contexts of each subsidiary (cf. Hofstede 1980). The political frame argues that the organizations become arenas for the struggle between the local managers' need for autonomy and the headquarters' desire for control. Both approaches focus on coercive isomorphism or the imposition of the headquarters' patterns on the subsidiary, and on local resistance to such impositions (Westney 2005: 58). However, it is also important to note that this issue raises questions about the level of analysis within multinational organizations; organizational isomorphism may from the top-management be seen as mimetic, whereas the national subsidiaries may see it as coercive. In the context of employer

branding, this would implicate that the top management of Shell globally view it as if they imitates or copies successful competitors or universal “best practices”, whereas A/S Norske Shell may view the employer branding activities as coercive as it is forced from the top down in the MNC. Simultaneously, the local isomorphic pulls on the subsidiary may not be visible to parent company managers (Westney 2005: 59).

On the one hand, the multinational organization can be seen as the source of strong isomorphic pulls toward similarity across the organizational structures and processes of subsidiaries. This could implicate that the subsidiary is likely to mirror the head office to some extent. Additionally, each subsidiary is also operating within a local organizational field that exerts a range of isomorphic pulls on the organization. However, it is important to note that local tailoring may not necessarily mean adopting patterns and activities that are dominant in local organizations, because the local environment may in fact not be dominated by ‘national’ organizations, but rather by MNC subsidiaries. It is also suggested that the local subsidiary may manage to “[...] *free itself from both home and host country patterns*” (Westney 2005: 59), so as to become an organization which is not subject to either strong home or host country effects.

Based on the above discussion, one may outline five alternative hypotheses:

1. The local subsidiary adopts the patterns and activities of the headquarters.
2. The local subsidiary adopts the patterns and activities of the domestic environment.
3. The local subsidiary adopts the patterns of other subsidiaries within the MNC.
4. The local subsidiary becomes a hybrid as it adopts patterns and activities from both the headquarters and the local environment.
5. The local subsidiary manages to free itself from the pressures of the headquarters and the local environment so as to develop distinctively.

Interestingly in the context of the MNC, the isomorphic pressures stem from both within the organization, as well as from the external environment. This dual level of interaction is important to keep in mind when analyzing the findings.

3.4.1 Theoretical expectations

With regards to employer branding in A/S Norske Shell, a potential challenge is likely to relate to the tension between local tailoring versus standardization in the MNC. On the one

hand, one could expect that A/S Norske Shell is subject to isomorphic pressures from Shell centrally, meaning that one has to adjust to the global strategy and the employer branding activities as set out and implemented by the global organization. At the same time, one may expect that A/S Norske Shell is subject to local isomorphic pulls from the domestic environment. This could for instance mean that A/S Norske Shell experiences pressure to adjust the employer branding activities so that they align with what is expected in the Norwegian context and conforms to local “best practices”. Thusly, A/S Norske Shell could be subject to both coercive and mimetic isomorphic pressures. There are several local organizations in the Norwegian oil and gas industry that may be said to exert local isomorphic pressures that A/S Norske Shell feels that it has to conform to. The fact that Statoil is regarded as the most attractive employer among Norwegian engineering students (Universum 2014b), illustrates that one could expect that the employer branding practices of Statoil are viewed as successful by the industry competitors. Although theory suggests that the local subsidiary may manage to “[...] *free itself from both home and host country patterns*” (Westney 2005: 59), so as to become an organization which is not subject either to strong home or host country effects, it is still expected that A/S Norske Shell must respond to the isomorphic pressures posed by the headquarters and the domestic environment. Ultimately, these pressures may in themselves be a challenge to A/S Norske Shell as the organization becomes “trapped” within or between these pressures. The endeavor of adjusting to the conflicting pulls may also be a challenge. The pressure of standardizing the employer branding activities in A/S Norske Shell with that of Shell centrally could be a challenge if it is experienced that the activities do not fit with the Norwegian context. Conversely, it may be a challenge to adjust to the pressures of the local environment if it does not fit with the overall Shell strategy, as this could produce fragmented and unclear messages. Thusly, A/S Norske Shell is pressured for consistency within the Shell group, while at the same time pressured for isomorphism with the local environment.

4 Methodological approach

4.1 Research approach

This thesis is a qualitative case study of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. The main unit of analysis in this study is A/S Norske Shell. It has been important to be conscious about the unit of analysis, as it is possible to confuse A/S Norske Shell with Shell as a MNC. The case study approach implicates that it is possible to gain in-depth and rich data of the concept that is being studied (Flyvbjerg 2004: 390). In order to answer the research questions, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. As previously stated, there is a lack of empirical data on employer branding as well as a research-practice divide (Edwards 2012: 189; Frandsen and Morsing 2009: 256; Martin and Groen-in't-Woud 2011: 170-171). These are some of the reasons as to why a qualitative case study could be particularly fertile; namely in order to explore the phenomenon of employer branding in more depth. Furthermore, a case study's value lies in its ability to describe situations that contain new and emergent ideas, or test and challenge existing ideas (Frandsen 2011: 58). As a research approach, this study can be said to be anchored in a constructivist perspective as it is interested in understanding and interpreting the informants' conception of the phenomenon (Tjora 2010: 91-92).

One often distinguishes between inductive and deductive approaches to research (Tjora 2010: 23-25). An inductive approach is often described as being bottom-up, meaning that the data is driving the analysis and discussion. A deductive approach means that one is testing theoretically grounded assumptions with the data. It is also important to note that these strategies are not necessarily mutually excluding, and can be combined in a single study (Tjora 2010: 23-25). In this study, the first and third research questions were based on theoretical assumptions; hence one could say that they were approached deductively. The second research question, asking about the presumed institutionalized recipe on employer branding, was originally not based on any theoretical assumptions. Hence, the analysis was driven by the gathered data. As I started to analyze the data, applicable theory was included. This is in line with an abductive approach, as theories and perspectives are included during the research process (Tjora 2010: 24-25).

I early decided that I wanted to write my thesis around reputation management or branding with a 'real' organization as a case. The inspiration for using A/S Norske Shell as a case was

initially triggered by an article about reputation management at Royal Dutch Shell as a part of a course during the spring semester of 2013: *OLA4050 – Prosjektforum*. I personally contacted and met with the HR department of A/S Norske Shell in the fall of 2013 to discuss the possible cooperation. I had not developed the specific research questions at that time, but it was important to emphasize that my thesis would be a theoretically grounded and independent work. This was also a point that was stressed by my supervisor, Haldor Byrkjeflot, at an early stage of the process. As I started to orient myself on the literature of reputation management and branding in the fall semester of 2013, I quickly became drawn to the concept of employer branding. I also discovered that there were not many academic studies on the topic, but it seemed that several organizations, including A/S Norske Shell, were very concerned with their reputation as an employer. This observation inspired the first research question; namely, the motives and driving forces of employer branding. In January 2014, I used substantial time on orienting myself on the literature of reputation management and the branding discipline, resulting in tentative research questions that are relatively similar to the ones being presented in this study. As I had access to the organization's intranet and e-mail systems, this made it easier to recruit the right informants. I also got access to some of the internal documents, and it was important to be aware of the documents' potential normative character. The documents are used as supplements in this study.

4.2 Literature review and source criticism

As previously stated, the current literature on employer branding is fragmented and mostly associated with practitioner contributions (Edwards 2012: 189; Frandsen and Morsing 2009: 256; Martin and Groen-in't-Woud 2011: 170-171). Thusly, one risks a bias in the literature that emphasizes the potential advantages and benefits of the concept. This was a situation I was aware of early in the process, and demanded that I had a conscious and reflective mind when reviewing the literature. Frandsen and Kjærgaard's (2014) distinction between functional, interpretative and critical approaches to branding provided a fertile framework for categorizing the literature. Additionally, it has been important to evaluate each literary contribution individually based on a good portion of individual judgment, or, as Kjeldstadli (1999: 109) puts it; "[...] *systematized common sense [my translation]*". Some of the key criteria in evaluating the literary sources have been the following: the origin and intention of the work; the position of the authors; the internal consistency of arguments; external

validness; theoretical versus normative arguments; level of transparency; references to others (as inspired by Kjeldstadli (1999: chapter 12) and Moses and Knutsen (2012: chapter 6 and chapter 9)). My supervisor, Haldor Byrkjeflot, suggested literary sources early in the process, and I also used search engines such as 'BIBSYS', 'JSTOR' and 'Google Scholar' to identify relevant literature. Key words such as 'reputation management', 'corporate branding', 'employer branding', 'researching employer branding', and 'employer reputation' provided good results. Firstly, I oriented myself on the literature of reputation management and branding. Christensen and Morsing (2008), Hatch et al. (2000) and Birkstedt (2012) offered good introductions, and I also used their references as inspiration for further mapping. Hence, some of the literature was gathered in line with the snowball approach (Gobo 2004). A potential risk is that the literature could be biased and selective, but this was sought countered by applying the distinctions as set out by Frandsen and Kjærgaard (2014).

Among the most important literary contributions to this study include Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Birkstedt (2012), Byrkjeflot (2010), Christensen and Morsing (2008), Edwards (2009; 2010; 2012), Frandsen and Kjærgaard (2014), Frandsen and Morsing (2009), Ghoshal and Westney (2005), Hatch et al. (2000), Heilmann et al. (2013), Martin and Groen-in't-Woud (2011), Parment and Dyhre (2009), Røvik (2007), and Schultz et al. (2012).

4.3 Recruiting the informants

The informants in this study were recruited on the basis of a strategic selection. Based on the literature review, as well as talking with the HR department of A/S Norske Shell, I assumed that it would be important to interview employees adhering to the HR-, recruitment- and communication departments, as they are emphasized as the most relevant actors in the employer branding literature. I asked the employees of the HR- and recruitment departments for suggestions as to the selection of informants, also known as snowball sampling (Gobo 2004). The main challenge of the snowball approach is that one risks that the informants know each-other, which could generate homogeneous opinions, and also affect the anonymity of the informants. However, the suggestions only formed a basis for the sample, and I also used other complementary strategies in order to recruit the informants. As I had access to the Shell intranet system, I could also look-up employees in the internal database, where some of them had described their professional qualifications and responsibilities. I mapped which of them that seemed to work most closely with employer branding, and made initial contact via

e-mail, where I stated the purpose of my project, as well as giving information about anonymity and confidentiality. I also informed about my intent to record the interviews with their consent.

In total, I recruited 10 informants; of which eight informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell and two informants adhering to Shell globally. The two latter informants were senior employees in the recruitment department of the organization. The informants of A/S Norske Shell ranged from junior employees to more senior personnel. I conducted three interviews with employees from the HR department, two interviews with employees from the recruitment department, and three interviews with employees from the communication department. All but one employee that I made contact with in A/S Norske Shell wanted to participate, which indicates that the topic of my study appealed to the informants. The number of informants was based on the intention to get a potential variance in opinions and experiences among the informants, as well as within and between the various departments. A list of the informants is attached in the appendix (Appendix A).

4.4 Interviews

In preparation for the interviews, I made an interview guide on the basis of my research objectives. I carefully aimed to structure the interview guide logically so that it would facilitate for most possible reflection. The interview guide (Appendix B) was broadly divided into three phases; an opening phase, a reflection phase and a closing phase (Tjora 2010: chapter 3). The interview guide can be described as semi-structured, and I tried to construct as open questions as possible, so as to not lead the informants on a particular track. This made it possible to ask more narrow questions during the interviews. Moreover, I was conscious about using the possible ‘silence breaks’ during the interviews, opening the possibility for enhanced reflection. This was useful in order to exploit their ‘true’ opinions about certain topics. However, it was also important that the informants should not feel any pressure during the interviews, thus not pushing them too far.

Before I started the interviews, I briefly introduced myself, the intention with the interviews, the wish to record the interviews, as well as informed about anonymity and confidentiality. All of the interviews with the employees of A/S Norske Shell were conducted in the company building, either in Stavanger or in Oslo, in a separate and closed meeting room. In order to

make the informants feel comfortable, biscuits, fruit and coffee were served on most of the interviews. Hopefully, this contributed to make the situation more natural. All of the interviews lasted between 1-1,5 hours, and were conducted during February and March 2014. The two informants adhering to Shell globally were interviewed by telephone. The reason as to why I also wanted to interview employees of the central level is due to the third research question, which specifically addresses the potential tensions between the central and the local level. A challenge with the telephone interviews was that I could not see the persons, which made it more difficult to establish a good and comfortable relation. However, practical conditions made this the most suitable option. I do not have an impression that language became a barrier as both of the informants spoke English fluently. In contrast to the personal interviews, the telephone interviews were not recorded because it was not possible. Hence, there is an increased possibility of misinterpretations and misquotations. It was therefore important to be concentrated and ask the informants to repeat their answer if in doubt.

4.5 Analysis of the data

The analysis can be said to be inter-subjective; thusly a product of the interaction between the informants and the interviewer (Tjora 2010: 22). After each interview, I made a reflection note to summarize the most important impressions. This became very valuable in the analysis of the data as it became easier to identify and map seemingly important quotes and reflections. Due to the number of interviews and the vast amount of data, the interviews were not transcribed. Conversely, I made an analysis scheme that strategically related to my research questions (Appendix C). I listened through all of the interviews at least one time, and rewound if necessary. I wrote down quotes in the analysis scheme while I listened through the interviews. I categorized the analysis thematically (Thagaard 2003), so as to get a holistic understanding of the gathered data. Hence, I was not mainly interested in a person-centered categorizing of the data, although I distinguished between the informants in order to map potential variances and differences in opinions. It was important to try to convey the context of the quotes in order to understand the original meaning.

4.6 Quality criteria

I regard reflection as an important quality criterion of my study. Throughout the whole research process, I have been conscious about reflecting around my choices and research

approach. Moreover, it has been important to be transparent around the steps in the research process, so that others could validate my approach. Therefore, I have tried to be open and share my thoughts and concerns with my supervisor, Haldor Byrkjeflot, during the process. I have also tried to be conscious about personal assumptions and values that could affect the quality of my work, as well as my role in interacting with the informants and the organization.

It has been important to be critical to the findings, and how I have interpreted the data. It is important that there is agreement between the theory, data and discussion of the study (Tjora 2010: chapter 7). Thagaard (2003) argues that the researcher should be transparent in explaining how one came to the conclusions, so that others could replicate and validate the work. According to Tjora (2010: 179) the validity of a research project can be increased by being open about how the research was conducted, account for the decisions that were made and being sensitive concerning which factors are important within the topic of research. I have tried to be transparent and reflective around my research approach and how I came to my conclusions. To summarize, I regard reflection and transparency as two of the most important quality criteria of my study.

4.7 Challenges and limitations

In addition to being a researcher, I have also been a part-time employee at A/S Norske Shell for a half year in the HR department. On the positive side, this has given me a good insight and knowledge of the organization during the period. Additionally, it has rewarded me with organizational know-who; and it is also likely that this position has given me a swifter access to informants. However, there are also some potential issues that could affect the reliability of this project. Firstly, my time as an employee could have impacted my view of the organization, which in turn could influence the analysis. Tjora (2010: chapter 7) argues that the best way to avoid this kind of bias is for the researcher to be aware of his own opinions and how they may influence the research. Doing this enables the researcher to reflect on how he affects the research and seek to minimize the impact. Having a conscious awareness of this will most likely impact the reliability in a positive direction. Additionally, it is vital to discuss my influence on the informants. Most of them were people with whom I have had little contact with as an employee at A/S Norske Shell, as most of them adhered to the Stavanger office. However, there is a risk that some of them answered what they perceived as socially acceptable and ‘correct’ due to my role in the organization. During some of the interviews, it

also appeared as some of the informants took for granted that I had knowledge of Shell's strategies around employer branding. In order to avoid missing important information because the informants presumed I already knew, I asked the informants to explain when I was unsure of what they meant. This ensured that the information was made explicit rather than implicit.

The case-study approach is often criticized for not being suitable for generalization (Flyvbjerg 2004: 37). This is also an obvious limitation in the context of this study; the data cannot be generalized to account for the wider population of A/S Norske Shell nor Shell globally. Rather, the data is a selective sample of employees and their opinions and experiences.

In an interview situation there is a possibility for an asymmetrical relation between the interviewer and the informant, because the balance of power is altered (Tjora 2010: chapter 3). Thusly, it becomes important to make the informants feel comfortable and relaxed in the situation so that the level of reflection and honesty could be maximized. Moreover, I interviewed several senior leaders of the organization, and I was aware of the possibility that they could answer what they thought were appropriate and socially acceptable. Hence, an important task became to try to break through their 'corporate shield'. This attempt was approached by emphasizing their anonymity, by structuring the interviews in a logical manner, by asking open questions in the beginning and narrowing them down appropriately, by taking advantage of silence, and by trying to add a portion of humor and joviality in the conversation.

A general challenge of deductive research is the possibility of verifying prior assumptions, rather than acknowledging potentially new insight. In other words, one may become blinded or biased by the theoretical lenses, which could negatively affect the validity of the study. This is a potential pitfall that it has been important to be aware of during the research process. Another challenge is the possibility of becoming blinded by the culture and the strong brand of Shell. This could ultimately lead to a biased study, which I have tried to counter by being reflective about it.

A possible methodological limitation of the study is that the quotes of the informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell have been translated from Norwegian to English. Hence, one risks that fragments of their expressions are lost or misinterpreted in the translation. However, I have been careful with trying to convey the *meaning* and the context of the quotes, rather than translating with the most equivalent words.

4.8 Ethics

An important ethical consideration for this study has been to preserve the informants' anonymity and confidentiality. Thusly, all of the quotes in this study are anonymous. Although the quotes can be linked with the respective departments of the employees, it is not possible to trace them back to individuals. Due to my part-time engagement in A/S Norske Shell, it has been particularly important to stress the research purpose of my study, and to distinguish it from my part-time job. This was made explicit to the informants in the e-mail invitation and prior to the interviews. It is also noteworthy that A/S Norske Shell has paid for my trips to Stavanger, where I conducted most of my interviews, without this affecting the validity or trustworthiness of the study. Apart from that, A/S Norske Shell has not paid for or commissioned this study. It is also important to emphasize that A/S Norske Shell has not put any constraints on my approach. My research approach was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) before I conducted the interviews. Merton's norms for scientific research (as cited in Ringdal 2001: chapter 4) include universalism, communication, disinterestedness and organized skepticism. This means that theories should be evaluated objectively, that the results should be shared with all the relevant actors, that one should be honest, and that one should have a critical view of existing research. These norms have been important complementary guiding principles during the research process.

5 Discussion and analysis

5.1 Motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell

5.1.1 Employer branding as a rational tool

The first research question aims to discuss the motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell, which can be approached from the modernist-, social constructivist-, and pragmatic institutional perspectives (Røvik 2007: chapter 2). On the one hand, central motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell can be viewed through the modernist lens as several of the informants emphasized the presumed instrumental and rational effects of employer branding. Based on the interviews, it is evident that employer branding in A/S Norske Shell is seen as contributing to more efficient and improved recruitment processes that support the overall business targets of the Shell group; namely to become “[...] *the world’s most innovative and competitive energy company*”, and to be “[...] *a leading graduate employer in a competitive industry*” (Informant 10, 2014). These excerpts point to the desired future vision of the organization. One of the informants also said that “[e]mployer branding is important because it could reduce our recruitment costs” (Informant 4, 2014). As stated in an internal document about the Shell employer brand, “[...] *Shell as an employer needs to be perceived as a ‘Gold-Standards’ brand [...] We need to create an ‘Excellence’ brand image [...]*” (Internal document 2, 2014). These excerpts fit well with the modernist perspective as they view employer branding as a tool to contribute to reach the desired future vision of Shell.

Several of the employer branding initiatives in A/S Norske Shell are designed and executed globally, illustrating the top-down approach in line with the modernist assumption. It also seems as if the employees of A/S Norske Shell have an impression that Shell globally views employer branding as a linear and controllable process that should give results if it is implemented correctly; the global strategies are seen as “best practices” on how to conduct successful employer branding across the Shell group. Hence, it is believed that employer branding could be transferred universally across the organization and that positive results could be reproduced in the various subsidiaries. A central driving force of employer branding

in A/S Norske Shell is thus the global organization, which aligns with the modernist assumption of top-down control. The top-down control is also strengthened by the fact that the recruitment department of A/S Norske Shell reports to line managers in the central organization.

One of the motives and driving forces of employer branding is to attract and recruit the “[...] *top-talents*” (Informant 2, 2014), so that they can contribute to add value to the business of Shell. “*Employer branding is a part of our global recruitment strategy, and we want to be regarded as an employer of choice so that we get the best possible people to solve our business challenges*” (Informant 3, 2014). The latter quote illustrates that employer branding is viewed as a rational tool to solve business and organizational challenges. A central motive is also to “[...] *enhance the quality of applicants*” (Informant 4, 2014).

Based on the interviews, it is evident that employees of A/S Norske Shell see the attraction and recruitment of graduate technical students as a challenge due to the local context in Norway; low levels of unemployment compared to other European countries and “[...] *the competition for technical talents in the industry*” (Informant 3, 2014). The Shell Campus Ambassador Programme is an employer branding activity that aims to deal with this challenge, by building relationships between students and current employees of A/S Norske Shell who have formerly attended the same university. Simultaneously, the employer branding activities are utilized to achieve a desired future vision of the organization; namely, to become a more attractive graduate employer in Norway, and specifically, “[...] *to be more attractive than ConocoPhillips on the Universum ranking*” (Informant 2, 2014). Hence, it has become a goal in itself to climb on the rankings of Universum, and it is believed that this can be done systematically. This illustrates that an important motive is to be viewed as more successful than competitors as one is compared on public rankings. However, this also means that the motive is something more than the rational aspect as it is about adjusting to external perceptions. This study will return to the significance of employer branding rankings when discussing the symbolic value of employer branding.

As previously stated, the most prominent employer branding activities in A/S Norske Shell are the Shell Campus Ambassador Programme, Shell Ideas 360 and Shell Eco-marathon. All of the mentioned activities are global and universal activities across the multinational organization. Additionally, A/S Norske Shell attends career fairs and facilitates case studies at

targeted universities. All of these activities are seen as being consistent and in accordance with one another. As one of the informants stated:

All of the employer branding activities in Shell are carefully designed so as to be in agreement with our corporate brand and visual identity [...] We need to be portrayed as a consistent and professional actor (Informant 7, 2014).

This quote fits well with the modernist expectation that the employer branding activities of A/S Norske Shell should be perceived to form a consistent and holistic unity aligned with organizational “needs” and other branding efforts.

5.1.2 The symbolic value of employer branding

It is evident that central motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell adhere to a rational or instrumental logic that is assumed to add value to the business and be a response to organizational challenges. However, it is apparent that employer branding is about more than dealing with business challenges; it also seems to have a distinct symbolic value. Two prevalent motives are to enhance the employer image and stakeholder perceptions of the organization; “[...] *we need to be perceived as an employer of choice, and students should think of us as professional, international and innovative*” (Informant 10, 2014). A central driving force seems to be to adjust to the expectations of the environment in order to gain legitimacy and credibility among targeted stakeholder groups. In the context of the social constructivist perspective, the description of “[...] *the competition for technical talents in the industry*” (Informant 3, 2014) could in itself be seen as socially constructed. This quote becomes particularly ambiguous when it is stated that A/S Norske Shell does in fact not have a severe “problem” with recruitment:

In general, we do not have a problem with recruitment, but we always feel that we could get better, and that we have to adjust our employer branding activities so that they align with the expectations of the market and our customers [...] And we need to ensure that our EVP is competitive and attractive (Informant 5, 2014).

Thusly, adjusting to the expectations of the environment seems to be an important motive and driving force in itself. The concerns with the reputation, image and stakeholder perceptions of A/S Norske Shell all account for a symbolic understanding. A/S Norske Shell wants to be perceived as a modern actor in the marketplace, which can be seen as a socially constructed

reality illustrating that the organization is in itself driving the demand for employer branding, as well as shaping the context and environment in which it operates. The interviews revealed that recruitment not necessarily is a particular “problem” of A/S Norske Shell, which illustrates that the recipe on employer branding constructs a problem definition, as well as offers a solution to it. On the basis of this, it could be argued that A/S Norske Shell works with employer branding because it is expected and demanded by the environment, not because it is a pressing organizational issue. Consequently, employer branding might be understood as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A motive could also be to copy and follow the development of employer branding activities of competitors that are viewed as successful. Eight of the informants compared the employer branding activities of A/S Norske Shell to that of Statoil, Aker Solutions and DNV GL. It was also argued by four of the informants, adhering to A/S Norske Shell, that the organization had a problem with differentiation, which could be seen as a result of isomorphic processes, originally discussed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Accordingly, the homogenization of employer branding activities in the oil and gas industry could be understood as a result of isomorphic processes where organizations are copying and imitating each other. This argument should also been seen in conjunction with other powerful institutional carriers that may drive processes of homogenization; for instance Universum. In fact, one may argue that employer branding has become a dominating idea in A/S Norske Shell due to the influence of fashion-spreaders such as Universum (cf. Abrahamson 1996).

A/S Norske Shell and employer branding rankings: the case of Universum

Another central driving force seems to be public employer branding rankings that illustrate how the organization is perceived in various stakeholder environments. The vast majority of the informants mentioned the rankings of Universum, and seven of them pointed to the observation that A/S Norske Shell has not been listed among the top employers in Norway the recent years. The Universum rankings are assumed to be good indicators and a measurement of the effects of employer branding activities. Moreover, one of the informants noted that A/S Norske Shell was appraised from Shell centrally when the subsidiary climbed on the Universum rankings from one year to another (Informant 2, 2014). This implicates that the rankings of Universum are defining the organizational reality of the organization, leading to the argument that the research and consulting firm seems to have gained a prominent position

as a defining and powerful carrier in the field. The position of Universum is strengthened by the fact that it is both a ranking organization and a consultancy organization. Hence, it has a dual role in that it expresses external perceptions of the organization, as well as offers consulting services that could help organizations enhance their positions and become 'employers of choice'. The fact that the rankings of Universum seem to have become a measurement of successful employer branding activities in Shell, could also be linked with the social constructivist assumption that organizations are adjusting to the perceptions of the environment.

Not only A/S Norske Shell, but the Shell group as a whole, make use of the Universum rankings to track the performance of the brand related activities among targeted stakeholder groups, such as graduate students, and to measure the effects of on-campus marketing activities. As is stated in an internal document describing the Universum reports: "*As Universum operates in multiple markets, this offers a cost-effective, consistent methodology and body of data to measure international performance annually*" (Internal document 4, 2014). Thusly, the Universum reports could be seen as form for standardized measurement in the MNC. Since 2012, Shell has used Universum to measure on-campus performance in several countries, such as in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Norway. In addition to the public rankings that are made available, Shell commissions customized reports which look exclusively at Shell's target universities for each market. One of the informants adhering to Shell globally also stated that: "*We get an annual review of our performance benchmarked against competitors and a snapshot of student behavior*" (Informant 9, 2014). This implicates that Shell uses the Universum reports as a basis when developing and measuring their employer branding activities. In an external interview with Navjot Singh, Global Marketing Manager and Recruitment- and HR Communication Manager at Royal Dutch Shell, it is also stated that Universum initially helped Shell develop its approach to employer branding (Van Mossevelde 2009). All of these examples illuminate the position of Universum in defining and constructing what is to be considered successful employer branding in the context of Shell. As is evident, Universum has both contributed to define Shell's initial approach to employer branding, as well as offered tools to measure the outcome and effects of employer branding activities. In the social constructivist terminology, Universum could be described as a fashion-spreader, and Shell, as well as A/S Norske Shell, could thusly be described as a fashion-follower (cf. Abrahamson 1996). The position of Universum illustrates that the process of employer branding has not been solely developed and initiated from within the

organization. On the basis of the interviews, it is not possible to state whether Shell initiated employer branding as a result of an internal organizational ‘problem’, or if one discovered the ‘problem’ after becoming aware of the employer branding concept. The position of Universum in the Shell group could be said to result in enhanced power to the central level of the organization. This is because the Universum reports offer standardized and universal criteria on how to measure ‘successful’ employer branding. According to Abrahamson (1996), these are also some of the criteria that are important in order to achieve popularity. Additionally, it is believed that the employer branding activities should be integrated and consistent, and thus needs central control. As is stated by the former country manager of Universum in Sweden, Anna Dyhre, “[b]eing consistent can not be emphasized enough” (Parment and Dyhre 2009: 131).

The Universum reports offered to various Shell subsidiaries are all measuring and comparing the subsidiaries against competitors based on standardized criteria. Despite the fact that A/S Norske Shell is compared with industry competitors, it is the field of employer branding that represents “best practice”, not the industry in itself. Although Universum seems to have gained a strong position as an indicator of successful employer branding within Shell, it is also evident that the employees of A/S Norske Shell do not automatically trust the rankings and reports of Universum. For instance, one of the informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell argued that the rankings are possible to manipulate as was evident when a competitor launched an excessive marketing campaign at the same time as the Universum survey was sent out to students. Evidently, the competitor made a substantial climb on the rankings the following year, presumably due to the “[...] *Universum stunt*” (Informant 5, 2014).

Nevertheless, it is evident that the Universum rankings are contributing to shape the internal agenda and organizational reality of A/S Norske Shell. Consequently, there seems to be little doubt that adjusting to the perceptions of the external environment is an important motive and driving force of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. Based on the interviews, it also seems reasonable to state that A/S Norske Shell is concerned with measuring the external perceptions, which adds to the social constructivist assumption that it is all about gaining trust and legitimacy in the external environment. From a social constructivist perspective, it is also emphasized that the followers’ intentions and justifications relate to the need to be perceived as legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

5.1.3 The ambiguity of employer branding

There are few examples of local initiatives of employer branding, and the top-down management and control of employer branding, could from A/S Norske Shell's perspective be seen as a coercive isomorphic pressure stemming from the global organization. This opens up for a potential power struggle between the central organization and the subsidiary. On the one hand, it is clear that the global strategies of Shell need to be implemented consistently in the subsidiaries, which seem to be recognized among the informants of A/S Norske Shell. However, A/S Norske Shell is not an actor that passively conforms to the instructions of Shell globally; rather, one is *trying* to adjust and translate the activities so that they fit with the Norwegian context. This is reflected in a quote from one of the informants; *"Of course, we are a global company and many of our employer branding activities are standardized. However, we always try to adapt the global strategies to fit with the local context"* (Informant 5, 2014). The latter quote points to the fact that employer branding in A/S Norske Shell is about the translation and adjustment of ideas; not passive acceptance. At the same time, this means that employer branding as a strategy is not transferred frictionless within the MNC, which is opposed to the modernist assumption. Additionally, several informants pointed to the challenge and difficulty of measuring the effects of employer branding activities. As one of the informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell said:

I am skeptical to the Universum rankings and think that we should not only measure and compare our performance on the basis of the Universum reports [...] because they could be manipulated and may not fit in Norway where Shell is not as large as for instance in the Netherlands or in the UK (Informant 5, 2014).

Moreover, the motives and driving forces may not be interpreted to adhere either to a rational or a symbolic logic. Based on the interviewees, it seems more appropriate to regard both logics as constituting the rationale of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. On the one hand, employer branding is about making attraction and recruitment more effective and aligned with the overall Shell strategy. On the other hand, employer branding is about improving the stakeholder perceptions of A/S Norske Shell that account for enhanced employer image and employer reputation. Thusly, employer branding is a symbolic endeavor which is about adjusting to the expectations of the environment. However, the rational and symbolic logics do not necessarily need to be viewed as mutually excluding. Rather, the tension and dynamics between the different logics could be regarded as a driving force in

itself; employer branding in A/S Norske Shell is not solely based on passive implementation and adaptation of the Shell strategy, nor is it only about adjusting to the expectations of the environment. Thusly, the need for efficiency and the need for external legitimacy can both be seen as central motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell, in line with the pragmatic institutional perspective.

5.2 A/S Norske Shell and the recipe on employer branding

The second research question aims to discuss A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding in light of the presumed institutionalized recipe on it, and identify which challenges that could arise. Firstly, the recipe states that one should research and map internal and external perceptions of the organization, which in turn forms the basis for developing the EVP. The EVP should convey the core values and also establish the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the organization. It is evident that Shell has used internal and external research in order to define the EVPs and identify what makes the organization unique. Shell has developed two distinctive EVPs that relate to two key stakeholder groups; graduate students and experienced professionals (Informant 4, 2014). In having developed and adjusted the EVPs to the particular stakeholder groups, Shell has followed the recipe and acknowledged the possible heterogeneity in needs and values of the different target groups. The EVP targeted towards graduate students emphasizes four dimensions: 'together', 'discover', 'impact' and 'connected' (Internal document 5, 2014). The Shell graduate EVP responds directly to the candidate question why one should join the company. Immediately, the segmentation and recognition of the possibility of heterogeneity among stakeholders seems not to fit with the ideals of corporate communication (Christensen and Morsing 2008: chapter 1). However, there is not necessarily a contradiction between having segmented EVPs and communicating consistently, as long as the EVPs are consistent with the corporate brand (Informant 5, 2014). In fact, the informants adhering to the global organization of Shell emphasized the need to segment and target the EVPs to various candidates. As such, it is recognized that the messages of the employer brand should be tailored along the predefined dimensions of the graduate EVP to fit with the *"[...] personality and values of the specific candidate"* (Informant 10, 2014). It could be argued that the segmentation and tailoring of messages adds to a manipulative dimension of employer branding, as it is about seducing and

convincing the specific candidate to choose the employer. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the recruiters and Shell Campus Ambassadors are encouraged to ‘sell’ the organization as an employer by trying to identify the particular values and needs of different candidates, for instance during personal conversations at career fairs (Informant 10, 2014). At the same time, it could be said to be expected that recruiters and other representatives should try to convince students to choose the organization as an employer during recruitment events, so it should not necessarily be interpreted as a form for negative manipulation.

As is previously stated, the Shell group has used Universum in the process of establishing and developing the initial EVPs. None of the informants can point to the exact process of when and how the EVPs were defined, which adds to the argument that it has been a top-down driven process. An internal document describing the Shell EVPs, states that the global recruitment team has undertaken a comprehensive study to define the Shell recruitment EVPs (Internal document 5, 2014). According to the recipe on employer branding, the EVP should convey a trustworthy and authentic representation of the organization: “[...] *the organization must do the identity homework before it can present itself in a way that appeals to current and future employees, authentically, consistently and effectively*” (Parment and Dyhre 2009: 89). Shell has used substantial resources on mapping internal and external perceptions of the organization, with the help of Universum. From the interviews, it is clear that the EVPs of Shell are global and standardized, with little local adjustments. A/S Norske Shell has not developed a distinctive EVP based on the local context. On the one hand, the informants adhering to the global organization of Shell, and two of the informants adhering to the communication department in A/S Norske Shell, emphasized the need for global and standardized EVPs in order to be perceived as a consistent and unified actor across national and cultural borders. On the other hand, four of the informants in A/S Norske Shell pointed to the challenge of not having a local EVP that fits with the domestic context. Additionally, it was argued that the graduate EVP of Shell is too general and broad. As one of the informants put it: *“I think that our EVP is a bit too general [...] It covers almost everything, and my opinion is that it should be more specific and focused”* (Informant 5, 2014). The recipe on employer branding emphasizes the need to portray the unique and distinctive aspects of the organization through the EVP. A/S Norske Shell’s challenge, however, is that the EVPs are perceived as too general and broad, resulting in that it becomes difficult to express the unique characteristics that differentiate A/S Norske Shell from competitors. When asked to describe the core essence of the graduate EVP, the informants emphasized various aspects. Although

all of the aspects that were mentioned could be related to the graduate EVP in some way or the other, there was a lack of a clear and consistent perception among the informants. Several of the informants, both adhering to the global organization and adhering to A/S Norske Shell, pointed to the challenge of differentiation. Particularly in Norway where there are several actors operating in the oil and gas industry, A/S Norske Shell risks being viewed as one among many. A challenge is thus to be positively differentiated from competitors.

According to the recipe, the process of employer branding should be aligned with the overall Shell strategy, which is “[...] *to become the world’s most innovative and competitive energy company*” (Internal document 1, 2014). This implicates that ‘innovation’ is a central aspect of what Shell wishes to express through the process of employer branding. It is argued that the employer brand should express ‘real’ and authentic aspects of the organization. Arguably, Shell aspires to be an innovative organization, but the fact that the informants do not view the organization as particularly innovative, is not harmonizing with the recipe on employer branding. The discrepancy with regards to the innovative aspect is also supported by an internal survey (Internal document 6, 2014). As Hatch and Schultz (2009: 118) have noted, “[...] *saying you are a particular kind of company does not make you one*”. At the same time, many of the projects in Shell, and in A/S Norske Shell in particular, could be described as technical innovations. For instance, A/S Norske Shell has been a pioneer with regards to complex underwater technology, (Informant 8, 2014), but it is not easy to brand and translate innovative endeavors to current and potential employees. Moreover, many of the projects and the technology are subject to confidentiality, which makes it even more difficult to express and communicate the innovative aspects. Branding and communicating ‘innovation’ is thus a key challenge of A/S Norske Shell in the context of the institutionalized recipe.

The recipe on employer branding emphasizes the need to balance rational and symbolic elements of the employer brand. Said in other words, one should balance between values that appeal to the ‘head’ and values that appeal to the ‘heart’. Informant 1 and informant 3, both adhering to the HR department of A/S Norske Shell, argued that Shell tends to overemphasize economic pay and benefits as motivations and reasons for choosing the company. In many ways, all of the informants characterize Shell as an organization that can be linked with hard values appealing to the ‘head’; being described as technical, professional, prestigious, global and with substantial financial strength. As one of the informants put it: “*I think Shell suffers a bit from being perceived as a faceless and dehumanized brand*” (Informant 9, 2014). Due to

this, it has been recognized by the global recruitment team that the employer brand also must convey symbolic elements, such as emotions, in order to win the hearts and minds of the candidates (Informant 9, 2014). Particularly, the EVP targeted towards graduate students emphasize the culture, values and social responsibility of Shell; elements adhering to a symbolic dimension. These attributes are particularly reflected in the dimensions of ‘together’ and ‘impact’. Moreover, a new global strategy that is due to be implemented in 2014, emphasizes the human, emotional and social aspects of the employer brand (Internal document 7, 2014). However, as can be interpreted from the interviews, Shell has tended to focus on what it demands and expects from the candidates. As one of the informants put it, *“A challenge is that we have been too concerned with what we want and what we expect, not what the candidates want or are looking for [...] If we are perceived as too professional, it may scare candidates from applying to us”* (Informant 5, 2014). This could negatively affect the attraction and recruitment of employees as Shell emphasizes what it demands and expects of candidates, and not what it has to offer candidates. Moreover, the messages of the EVP may add to the ego of the organization, which could be a challenge in the external communication of the employer brand. As such, A/S Norske Shell might become (unconsciously) internally focused, although that could also have a positive effect in binding the organization. Thusly, a challenge is to balance rational and symbolic dimensions of the employer brand, as well as balancing the presumed needs and values of different candidates.

The Shell EVPs are made available to the vast majority of the employees through the intranet. In addition to written material, the global Shell recruitment team has made e-learning tutorials and videos explaining the EVPs and how they should be used in a recruitment context. All of the informants adhering to the recruitment department were aware of the EVPs, but not all of the informants adhering to the HR- and communication departments could consistently retell the essence of the EVPs. One of the informants said that *“[...] our EVP is very well hidden, and I don’t think that other employees [other than HR- and recruitment] in the company know much about it”* (Informant 6, 2014). Hence, it seems as if the messages of the EVPs are less understood throughout the rest of the organization.

The recipe on employer branding emphasizes that the essence of the EVP should be a product of the key values of Shell, and that most employees should be able to answer what makes the organization unique and special (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004: 503-504; Heilmann et al. 2013: 289-290; Parment and Dyhre 2009: 153). The fact that there were discrepancies around such

questions, and what differentiates A/S Norske Shell from competitors, mean that there could be varied experiences and opinions around the uniqueness and specialness of the organization. This adds to the assumption that it could be a challenge to anchor the EVPs in the organization. Moreover, it could be linked with the previous discussion that the Shell EVPs are conceived as too broad and unspecific. An internal employer branding survey in 2014 (Internal document 6, 2014), revealed that the majority of the current employees enrolled at the Shell Graduate Programme were not able to express the core elements of the EVP. This is particularly interesting due to the fact that this group has been recruited into A/S Norske Shell during the last five years. Additionally, several of these graduate employees are members of the Shell Campus Ambassador Programme; meaning that they attend career- and recruitment events at targeted universities in Norway with the aim of attracting graduate students to A/S Norske Shell. The fact that several of the employees were not able to describe the core essence of the EVP, neither in a consistent manner nor with their own words, adds to the assumption that the graduate EVP is not thoroughly implemented and acted upon in the organization. This is an important aspect that the recipe on employer branding emphasizes, and which seems to be a challenge in the context of A/S Norske Shell. Although the recruitment department states that the EVP is explained to the members of the Shell Campus Ambassador Programme, this is not reflected in the survey. However, it should be noted that the informants adhering to the recruitment department state that there is not necessarily a link between ‘knowing’ the official Shell EVP and being a good Shell Campus Ambassador; in fact, being able to express a personal perspective on what makes A/S Norske Shell a good employer, could be equally effective and appealing in communicating with the candidates. Notwithstanding, both the interviews and the internal graduate survey revealed that there is not a clear understanding of what is the core message of the employer brand of A/S Norske Shell.

The recipe on employer branding states that the EVP and the employer branding activities should be consistent and in line with other branding efforts; the employer brand must be aligned with the corporate brand. A/S Norske Shell is close to the recipe on this area, although it has segmented EVPs to different stakeholder groups. Several of the informants mentioned the need to appear as a unified and integrated actor. All of the employer branding activities in A/S Norske Shell seem to be rationally planned and implemented in the organization. The importance of expressing a global and common visual identity is emphasized by three of the informants, of which two adhere to the communication department of A/S Norske Shell and

one to the global recruitment department, which adds to the presumed importance of having integrated employer branding activities. Moreover, the fact that all of the employer branding activities are “[...] *carefully selected to support the Shell strategy and corporate brand*” (Informant 10, 2014), illuminates the technocratic dimension of the Shell culture. As one of the informants put it: “*I need facts and numbers to prove my point and get heard in the organization [...] You should choose your battles wisely*” (Informant 2, 2014). This quote seems to fit with an engineering culture, where rational and scientific proving are important factors of decision-making. The technocratic aspect of the Shell culture has also been discussed in other studies. As Julie Verity (2005: 83) puts it when discussing the transformation of Shell’s advertising activities in the 2000s, “*The combination of researching, proving, using hard data with rigour and consistency, was from the heart of Shell’s technocratic culture*”. This also seems to be the case for employer branding activities, as they need to be rationally planned and implemented so as to support the business goals of the Shell group, as well as be aligned with the corporate brand.

The fact that the HR- and recruitment departments are two separate business units do not fully harmonize with the recipe on employer branding, which stresses the importance of a fusion between HR- and marketing. The external marketing function of employer branding is within the recruitment department of A/S Norske Shell. Although the two departments are cooperating in the area of recruitment, they are also separated in that they have different business targets; the recruitment department is externally oriented with the aim of attracting and recruiting employees, whereas the HR department is internally oriented with the aim of developing and motivating current employees. One of the informants adhering to the HR department emphasized the need to unite the HR- and recruitment departments (Informant 2, 2014). A potential challenge of not being integrated is that the process of employer branding becomes fragmented, and that one loses the holistic aspect of the process. The recipe on employer branding emphasizes the need for a continuous and long-term strategy of employer branding that does not stop with the attraction and recruitment of employees. As expressed by one of the informants, it is important that A/S Norske Shell not only put effort in attracting and recruiting employees, but that the organization also continues with the employer branding process as the new employees are on-boarding and getting settled in the organization (Informant 3, 2014). In this context, the separation of the HR- and recruitment departments could be seen as a challenge, although it is only emphasized by two of the informants, of which both adhering to the HR department.

In A/S Norske Shell, the EVPs are communicated and marketed toward the target groups through a stakeholder perspective. A/S Norske Shell has few recruitment marketing campaigns, and the employer brand is distributed through targeted channels and at targeted universities. Although the target groups are clearly identified, in line with the recipe on employer branding, A/S Norske Shell has a challenge in communicating and marketing the EVPs. As one of the informants adhering to the communication department of A/S Norske Shell said, *“Shell is not top of mind in Norway”* (Informant 6, 2014). Informant 1 and informant 3 also expressed similar opinions. These informants, in addition to informant 5, stated that A/S Norske Shell has a smaller recruitment marketing budget compared to for instance Shell in the Netherlands or Shell UK, which also is perceived as a challenge due to the competition for technical talents in the Norwegian context. Moreover, the latter quote illustrates an important point with regards to reputation management: A/S Norske Shell seems to be more concerned with protecting its reputation rather than proactively seeking to influence the stakeholders’ perception of it (Informant 6, 2014). As is indicated by informant 6, this attitude has spilled-over in the domain of employer branding: *“We are probably a bit slow and reactive in our employer branding approach”* (Informant 6, 2014).

The final step of the employer branding process according to the recipe is to monitor, measure and adjust the activities so that they are aligned with employer expectations and market demands. As previously discussed, A/S Norske Shell relies partly on the Universum reports in this step of the process. The Universum reports rank the position of A/S Norske Shell as an attractive employer among students and experienced professionals, and the organization is also compared and benchmarked against competitors. The Universum reports provide an important basis for monitoring and adjusting the employer branding activities. Universum suggests areas of improvement for A/S Norske Shell. The question of how to measure successful employer branding is, however, problematized by four of the informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell. All of the informants mention the Universum rankings and reports as important indicators of the effects of employer branding, but four informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell want to use them with caution as they may not be an objective measurement. It is also clear that Shell has adjusted the global EVPs in line with presumed changing market demands and candidate perceptions. A global employer branding strategy that is due to be implemented in 2014, illustrates the effort of Shell to adjust the graduate EVP to become more associated with human, emotional and innovative aspects (Informant 9, 2014).

On a general level, it is reasonable to argue that A/S Norske Shell follows the presumed institutionalized recipe of employer branding on important areas. The organization has developed two segmented EVPs by using information about internal and external perceptions of Shell. Moreover, the EVPs are seen to be in accordance with the corporate brand, and communicated through targeted channels. It is also evident that A/S Norske Shell monitors and measures the effects of its employer branding activities, for instance through the reports and rankings of Universum. This is in line with the recipe. However, A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding also differs on some areas. Firstly, the innovative aspect that the organization wishes to brand externally is not well recognized internally. This implicates that there is a discrepancy between how Shell wishes to be perceived in external environments and how the organization is perceived internally. A central aspect of the recipe on employer branding is the need to present the organization in an authentic, trustworthy and consistent manner. This can be referred to as the second phase of the employer branding process, which is a challenge in the context of A/S Norske Shell. Secondly, the balance of rational and symbolic dimensions of the employer brand as emphasized by the recipe, has been a challenge to Shell as the organization has been described as “[...] *a faceless and dehumanized brand*” (Informant 9, 2014). Thusly, A/S Norske Shell emphasizes values appealing to the ‘head’, and to a lesser extent values that are appealing to the ‘heart’. The recipe on employer branding also states that the EVP should entail the unique and distinctive characteristics that distinguish the organization from competitors. On this area, A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding seems to be diverging, as the EVPs are described as being too general, and that it is difficult to distinguish the organization from competitors in the local environment.

5.3 Employer branding and the multinational challenges

The third research question aims to discuss challenges of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell as a result of being a part of a multinational company. The following discussion will place particular emphasis on domestic isomorphic pressures and isomorphic pressures from the headquarters. Additionally, tensions between the downstream and the upstream businesses will be emphasized.

On the one hand, it is evident that A/S Norske Shell is subject to local isomorphic pressures. It is recognized that the oil and gas industry is large and influential in Norway, with several

organizations being present, and a history that shows that the industry has been important in the nation's welfare economy (Informant 3, 2014). Additionally, the local environment is dominated by national competitors, as well as subsidiaries of MNCs. All of the informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell pointed to the employer branding activities of local competitors; for instance competitors offering sponsored events with technical students; competitors having student competitions and sponsored trips; competitors offering company presentations and case studies. A/S Norske Shell also has employer branding activities at targeted universities, many of which are similar to that of local competitors, such as sponsored events, company presentations, guest lectures and case studies. It is evident that the informants of A/S Norske Shell experience a pressure to adjust their employer branding activities to the domestic context. The fact that A/S Norske Shell is compared with local competitors on the Universum rankings, mean that one experiences pressure to be similar to the competitors, while at the same time feeling that one has to stand out and be positively differentiated. The informants emphasized the 'specialness' of the Norwegian context; low levels of unemployment where technical students almost could "[...] *pick and choose between attractive jobs*" (Informant 4, 2014), and the challenge of satisfying high-demanding Norwegian students. Based on the interviewees, it is reasonable to argue that A/S Norske Shell in some areas seem uncertain of which employer branding activities that should be implemented. On the one hand, the informants expressed a commitment and trust to the potential positive effects of the global strategies of Shell, while at the same time being uncertain whether they would suit the Norwegian context. Six of the informants emphasized that A/S Norske Shell should be externally focused and look to the successful employer branding activities of local competitors. At the same time, three of the informants were skeptical to only imitating local competitors due to the uncertainty of the effect of their employer branding activities. Nevertheless, the fact that the informants expressed uncertainty opens up for the potential of mimetic isomorphism.

On the other hand, A/S Norske Shell is also subject to isomorphic pressures from the headquarters. All of the employer branding activities of the MNC are designed and executed globally, meaning that A/S Norske Shell in many situations accepts and conforms to the global strategies. As one of the informant described it, "*Shell believes that one size fits all [...] Obviously, that is not always the case, and it is sometimes hard for people working centrally to understand the situation in Norway*" (Informant 1, 2014). The latter quote verifies Westney's (2005: 59) hypothesis that the local isomorphic pulls may not be visible to

the parent company. There are few examples of locally designed and implemented activities of employer branding, which strengthens the assumption of a top-down approach from the headquarters. The headquarters seems to value standardized and integrated practices (Informant 1, 2014; Informant 10, 2014). As previously discussed, the emphasis on standardization and integrated practices can be linked with the development of corporate communication (Christensen and Morsing 2008: chapter 1). It is also recognized by the informants that a MNC needs to be portrayed as consistent and unified because unclear or conflicting messages may lead to a fragmentation of the employer- and corporate brands. At the same time, the top-down control and standardization of employer branding activities implicate that there is limited space for local tailoring. Obviously, global strategies risk not being applicable in every context. This is emphasized in the cultural frame of Westney (2005: 58). Based on the interviews, it is argued that the values that are attached to the global employer brand may not be suitable in a Norwegian context. For instance, it was argued that the emphasis on “[...] *world-class talent, top talents, only the best* [...]” (Informant 5, 2014), worked opposite of its intention because it risked not being appealing to Norwegian students. Thusly, one could say that the rational values that the global employer brand of Shell is built upon, are better suited in countries where individualism is more valued. In Norway, there is more emphasis on collectivism (Informant 1, 2014; Informant 6, 2014). Thusly, one could argue that it becomes more important with values appealing to the ‘heart’, but the fact that the Shell employer brand is appealing to the ‘head’, does not fit with the cultural values characterizing the Norwegian context. Moreover, three of the informants, of which two adhered to A/S Norske Shell and one adhered to Shell globally, stated that A/S Norske Shell had a challenge with attracting and recruiting women to technical roles (Informant 3, 2014; Informant 5, 2014; Informant 10, 2014). This could be related to the emphasis on values appealing to the ‘head’ and not to the ‘heart’, as the latter values could be said to be more aligned with feminine attributes. At the same time, it was stated that women had a tendency to underestimate their own skills and knowledge, resulting in disenfranchisement with the notion that Shell only seeks the best candidates (Informant 3, 2014; Informant 5, 2014).

Evidently, one of the main challenges of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell as a result of being a part of a multinational organization relates to the tension between standardization and local tailoring of activities, as well as to challenges related to cultural differences. Most of the employer branding activities are formed and executed top-down globally. As such, A/S Norske Shell is subject to coercive isomorphic pulls from the central organization.

5.3.1 Downstream and upstream: the tension between ‘head’ and ‘heart’

Another challenge as a result of being a part of a MNC, can be seen to stem from within the organization. A challenge in the context of A/S Norske Shell is rooted in the vertical integration of the organization. The different businesses of Shell; downstream, upstream, and projects & technology, have different prioritizations that have implications for the process of employer branding in the organization. Whereas the recruitment aspect of employer branding is adhering to the upstream function, the downstream business is mostly concerned with product branding. Evidently, the product branding that is dominating the external marketing of A/S Norske Shell, might be seen to negatively affect the employer brand. Consequently, one could argue that there is a trade-off between product branding and employer branding. Moreover, focusing on the branding of the products of A/S Norske Shell, such as petrol fuel, car wash and customer loyalty programmes, may add to the assumption that Shell is perceived as a “[...] *faceless and dehumanized brand*” (Informant 9, 2014). Three of the informants adhering to A/S Norske Shell emphasized the homepage of A/S Norske Shell with this respect. As one of them put it: “[o]ur homepage, for instance, is packed with impersonal stuff and the products we want to sell” (Informant 6, 2014). The focus on product branding often emphasizes rational values, which means that there is less focus on the projects and people of A/S Norske Shell; aspects adhering to the symbolic dimension. Although it is natural for Shell with both product branding and employer branding, and that they do not need to be seen as mutually excluding, a challenge is to balance the two concepts and integrate them consistently. The fact that one of the informants described Shell as a dehumanized brand might be seen as a result of being a part of a MNC; one wishes to standardize the branding efforts, which means that it becomes more difficult to personalize the employer brand and give it a human dimension. Thusly, the vertical integration of the business could be seen as a challenge in the process of employer branding. Moreover, balancing between the ‘head’ and the ‘heart’ in the employer branding process is a particular challenge.

It is reasonable to argue that A/S Norske Shell is subject to dual isomorphic pressures from the headquarters and from the domestic environment. On the one hand, A/S Norske Shell experiences pressure to conform to the employer branding activities that fit with the Norwegian context and that are in line with that of local competitors. At the same time, the vast majority of the employer branding activities of A/S Norske Shell are stemming from the

global organization, and there is, naturally perhaps, a pressure from the headquarters to integrate and standardize the activities across the group. Hence, it is fair to say that the employer branding activities of A/S Norske Shell to a large degree mirror that of the headquarters. However, the informants emphasize that the global employer branding activities do not always fit with the Norwegian context and situation, but that they have to be implemented as a part of the global strategy. The challenge is that the employer brand emphasizes values that appeal to the 'head' at the expense of values that appeal to the 'heart'. The dilemma of standardizing employer branding across Shell as a MNC, versus tailoring employer branding to the local context, is thus a key challenge. It is reasonable to conclude that A/S Norske Shell to a large degree adopts the activities of the headquarters due to coercive isomorphism, but at the same time tries to adjust the activities so that they align with the local context and that of competitors, due to mimetic isomorphism. Hence, A/S Norske Shell is best understood as a hybrid as it adopts patterns and activities both from the headquarters and the local environment.

6 Conclusion

This thesis started by discussing the antecedents and developments of employer branding in relation with the literature on reputation management and the branding discipline. It was illustrated that the current literature on reputation management and corporate branding is ambiguous due to various understandings of the linkages between reputation management and corporate branding. I have argued that reputation management and corporate branding is best understood as two scientific conversations going on at the same time, talking about similar issues, but having different ways of solving the presumed challenges. Although reputation management traditionally has been anchored within corporate communication, and corporate branding traditionally has been anchored within marketing, it seems that the concepts have been drawn closer to each other and that both emphasize the importance of balancing between internal and external perceptions. This is also the case for employer branding, which emphasizes the need to align internal and external perceptions of the organization, although the concept regards potential and current employees as the most important stakeholders. Notwithstanding, it is evident that the branding logic is influencing and shaping the management practices of several organizations, including A/S Norske Shell.

This study has discussed three research questions related to employer branding in A/S Norske Shell. Firstly, it is evident that the motives and driving forces of employer branding in A/S Norske Shell could be said to adhere to both a rational and a symbolic logic. From a rational perspective, employer branding is justified as an activity to solve business challenges and to contribute to more efficient and professional recruitment processes. It is intended to support the Shell strategy by recruiting the best talent, and to achieve a desired future vision by becoming a leading graduate employer. To some degree, it is also believed that employer branding is a controllable process that could be utilized in a linear manner with the intended effects. Several of the employer branding strategies and activities in A/S Norske Shell are formed at the global level of Shell, and is mainly top-down driven, in line with the modernist perspective. Conversely, it is also illustrated that employer branding is justified as activities that are conforming to the norms and expectations of the external environment, in line with the social constructivist perspective. Additionally, it is held that the effects of employer branding activities are reflected in employer branding rankings, such as those of Universum. Thusly, an important motive is to gain trust and legitimacy in the external environment. Moreover, it is reasonable to argue that Universum is a powerful actor in defining what is to

be considered successful employer branding. Consequently, A/S Norske Shell is both rational and symbolic in its approach to employer branding, and it is evident that the justifications of employer branding are concatenated in a dual logic feeding from both perspectives. The latter claim is in line with the pragmatic institutional perspective. Although the employer branding activities are developed and executed at the global level of Shell, it is evident that the employees of A/S Norske Shell try to adjust the activities so that they are aligned with the local context. This is for instance reflected in the critical statements around presumed cultural differences; e.g. that the universal values appealing to the 'head' are not necessarily compatible with values in a Norwegian context, and that the global graduate EVP should be adjusted to local conditions. However, the perspectives are not seen as dichotomous, and it is evident that they emphasize different motives and driving forces that together account for a holistic understanding of employer branding.

A/S Norske Shell is in many ways conforming to the presumed institutionalized recipe on employer branding, for instance in having build the EVPs on internal and external research of stakeholder perceptions. The Shell EVPs are global and standardized across the MNC, which is in line with the recipe's emphasis on brand coherence and top-down control. A/S Norske Shell distributes its employer brand through targeted channels at targeted universities, and also acknowledges the potential heterogeneity in needs and values of various candidates. The Shell graduate EVP entails four dimensions that are intended to appeal both to the 'head' and the 'heart'. Thusly, the most important carriers of the Shell employer brand, such as the recruiters and the employees adhering to the Shell Campus Ambassador Programme, are encouraged to 'live the brand' and internalize the EVP so that they can 'sell' A/S Norske Shell as an employer to talented candidates. This is in line with the recipe on employer branding, but it is also important to note that this adds to a manipulative dimension of employer branding as it is about persuading individual candidates, and at the same time demands that the Shell 'brand ambassadors' internalize the brand values so that they act in the best interest of the organization.

A/S Norske Shell's approach to employer branding differs from the recipe in that the balance between rational and symbolic dimensions, 'head' and 'heart', is distorted. In a Norwegian context, the Shell employer brand is perceived as appealing more to the 'head' than the 'heart', which has the effect that A/S Norske Shell is perceived as a hard brand, ultimately resulting in a challenge to attract women. Additionally, A/S Norske Shell has not managed to

define and express what makes the organization unique and differentiated from competitors. This is a major challenge in the context of the institutionalized recipe on employer branding. Furthermore, there is a challenge to brand A/S Norske Shell as an 'innovative' organization as the employees cannot identify with this characterization. At the same time, it is evident that several of the projects in Shell, and in A/S Norske Shell in particular, could be regarded as technical innovations, but that there is a challenge to express these aspects due to technical complexity and confidentiality of several projects.

Finally, the thesis has discussed the challenges related to employer branding as a result of being a part of a MNC. It is clear that A/S Norske Shell is subject to dual isomorphic pressures from the domestic environment and the headquarters. On the one hand, A/S Norske Shell experiences pressure to conform to the employer branding activities that fit with the Norwegian context and that are in line with those of national competitors. At the same time, the employer branding activities of A/S Norske Shell are stemming from the global organization, and there is, naturally perhaps, a pressure from the headquarters to integrate and standardize the activities across the group. Simultaneously, the parent company managers are not recognizing the local isomorphic pulls that A/S Norske Shell is subject to. The dilemma of standardizing employer branding across Shell as a MNC, versus tailoring employer branding activities to the local context, is thus a key challenge. It is reasonable to conclude that A/S Norske Shell to a large degree adopts the activities of the headquarters due to coercive isomorphism, but at the same time tries to adjust the activities so that they align with the local context and that of competitors, due to mimetic isomorphism. Hence, A/S Norske Shell is best understood as a hybrid as it adopts patterns and activities both from the headquarters and the local environment.

6.1 Further research

Employer branding is advancing as a research field, and there are several topics that could broaden and add to our understanding of the concept. Firstly, the assumption that the external environment demands that organizations should communicate, is a premise for the potential that organizations could seduce themselves with their messages (Christensen 1997: 197-198). Employer branding requires organizations to portray themselves in an ideal and favorably manner both internally and externally, and it could be interesting to research whether employer branding could be understood as auto-communication. The notion of auto-

communication could function as a lens to discuss how the external communication of the employer brand might result in the enhancement of the organizational self, as well as strengthening a narcissistic organizational mentality. For instance, it could be argued that Shell's emphasis on attracting 'world-class talent', 'top-talents', and having values that appeal to the 'head', strengthens the internal impression that Shell is a professional and prestigious organization. If one accepts the latter premise, it would be interesting to discuss how this process may affect the organizational culture and the notion of self within the organization, as well as how this may affect the external communication of the employer brand.

As indicated in this study, the management of employer branding involves a dimension of power, as it is about seducing and persuading individuals to work for an organization. This is a topic that is relevant in the critical perspective on branding (Frandsen and Kjærgaard 2014: 652-653). The increased emphasis on segmented EVPs and tailored messages to different candidates could be seen as a new development, aiming to win the hearts and minds of potential and current employees. It would be interesting to do a study on employer branding from a power perspective, focusing on whether, and to which degree, it could be seen as an expression of 'power over' (cf. Clegg et al. 2006: chapter 7). Such an analysis could account for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the employer branding concept, and which consequences it could have. For instance, employer branding could be seen as a way of manipulating employees through values, in line with the critical perspective on branding and the research tradition focusing on employee branding (Edwards 2012: 393). In order for the top management to secure that employees 'live the brand' and are aligned with corporate values, they must control behavior to some degree. At the same time, it could be interesting to research the role of Universum in more depth, as it is evident that the organization is an influencing and defining actor in the field of employer branding. Moreover, it would be interesting to research the tensions within departments in a MNC in relation with the reception of the recipe on employer branding, for instance HR versus communication.

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Appendix A

List of informants

Informant 1: A/S Norske Shell, HR department

Informant 2: A/S Norske Shell, HR department

Informant 3: A/S Norske Shell, HR department

Informant 4: A/S Norske Shell, Recruitment department

Informant 5: A/S Norske Shell, Recruitment department

Informant 6: A/S Norske Shell, Communication department

Informant 7: A/S Norske Shell, Communication department

Informant 8: A/S Norske Shell, Communication department

Informant 9: Shell International, Recruitment department

Informant 10: Shell International, Recruitment department

Appendix B

Interview guide

- Thank you for participating
- Introduce myself
- The aims of my project
- Interested in personal opinions and experiences; not necessarily the 'right' answers
- Anonymity and confidentiality
 - o The right to withdraw
- Time: approx. 1 – 1,5 hours
- Will be recorded with your consent
 - o NSD confirmation
- Only I will have access to the data, and it will be deleted after May 15th

Introduction

- Tell briefly about your background and role(s) in the Shell group
- What characterizes the culture in Shell?
 - o A 'one company' culture or subcultures?
 - o Differences globally/ locally?
- How would you describe Shell as a company? What is special about it?

Shell's reputation and brand position

- What do you understand with employer branding?
 - o Explain if uncertain
 - o Describe the activities
 - o Who are responsible for the activities?
- How would you describe the reputation of Shell as an employer?
 - o Globally/ locally
 - o Experienced hires/ students: which image?
 - o Why this position?
- Why, or why not, is employer branding important?

- Which role do you see yourself in with regards to employer branding?
- Can you describe the activities that aim to strengthen A/S Norske Shell's employer brand?
 - o Challenges
- In your opinion, has the work with employer branding any effects?
- How can one know whether or not one has been successful in branding A/S Norske Shell as an attractive employer?
- In your opinion, what differentiates A/S Norske Shell from competitors?
- How would you describe the special characteristics of this industry?
 - o What have been the main developing trends?
- What is the core message of the Shell employer brand?
 - o Describe the EVP
- What is challenging with branding A/S Norske Shell as an attractive employer in a Norwegian context?

The global and local level

- Can you describe the relation between the local and global level in Shell?
 - o "Top-down" or "bottom-up"?
 - o Cooperation/ challenges/ internal tensions, decision making?
 - o Involvement?
- What was/ is done at the global versus local level in terms of organizational reputation and employer branding?
 - o Describe concrete measures
 - o How do employees related to this?
- Too which degree is the (employer) branding standardized across the organization?

Challenges

- What have been the main ways of communicating / sharing information about the (employer) brand / process internally?
 - o Externally
 - o Challenges
- Who is responsible for communicating the essence of the employer brand internally/ externally and what are the main communication channels?

- (Global manager: How is the coherence and consistency in global brand communications ensured? How are the local activities followed up?
 - o Coordination mechanisms?)
- What kind of cultural issues have affected/ are affecting the branding activities within Shell?

Closure

- In your opinion, what is the most important aspect we have talked about?
- Is there anything that we have not talked about, that you believe is important or may be relevant?
- Is it ok if I contact you if I have any further questions about what we have talked about?
- Thank you!
- Further process...
 - o Analysis
 - o Deadline 15th May, 2014
- Contact information if any questions or inquiries

Appendix C

Analysis scheme

	Informant	Quote	Relevance	Literature
Shell (characteristics, culture etc.)				
Rational				
Symbolic				
Universum				
Ambiguous				
Research				
EVPs				
Actors				
Rational vs. symbolic				
Challenges				
Domestic pulls				
Competitors				
Headquarters'				
Tensions				
Standardization vs. tailoring				

All sources used in this paper are listed.

Word count: 24 903.

